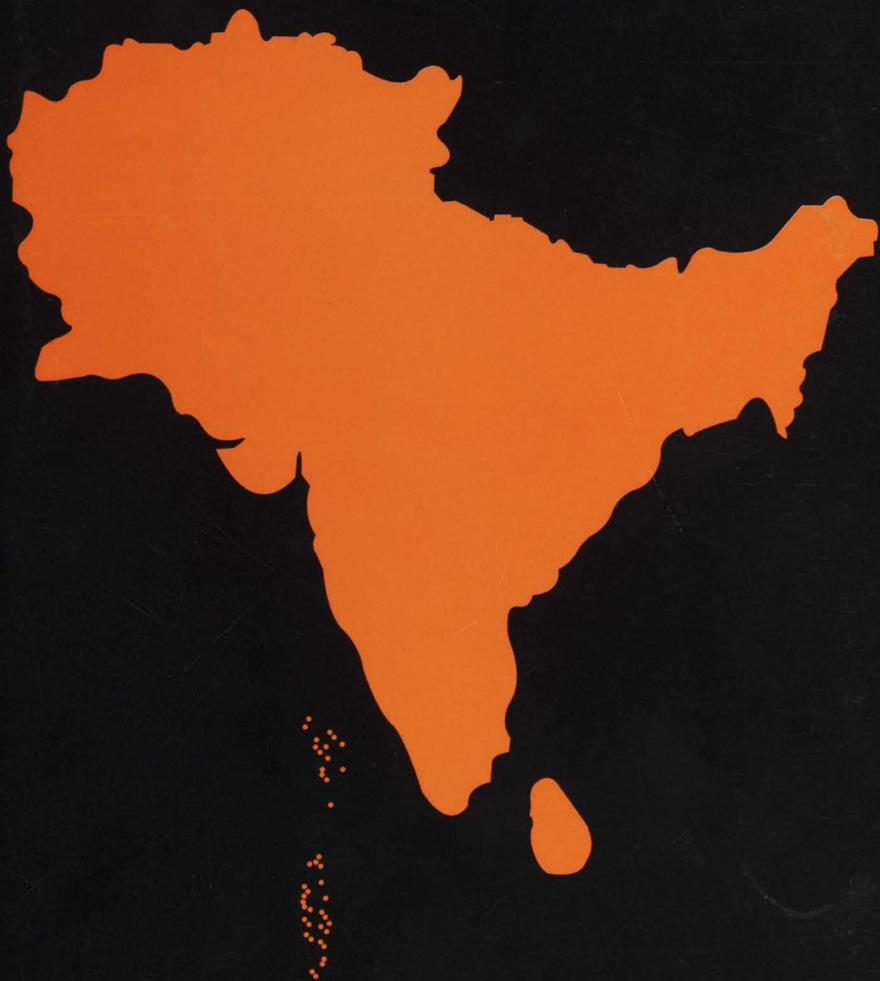


SAGAR

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Hindutva and Globalization: An Unlikely Combination?

DAVID P. ARULANANTHAM

OXFORD UNIVERSITY

“Computer chips yes, potato chips no”

Murli Manohar Joshi,

Former Indian Minister for Human Resource Development

INTRODUCTION

In the months prior to the 1995 assembly elections in the Indian state of Maharashtra, the coalition comprised of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its regional ally, Shiv Sena, pledged to overturn a controversial \$2.9 billion power project negotiated by the ruling Congress party with Enron, vowing to “throw Enron into the Arabian Sea” (asiaweek.com, 18 August 1995, 1). After winning power, the BJP/Shiv-Sena alliance rejected the contract but renegotiated a new one on terms even less favorable to the Maharashtrian government. The BJP’s 1998 federal election manifesto itself expressed a strong swadeshi (self-reliance) component, causing speculation that the party would end the program of external economic liberalization initiated by the Congress government of Narasimha Rao in 1991, and descend into protectionism. To quote:

...the economy of India has come under tremendous pressure because of misguided tariff reductions and an uneven playing field for the Indian industry ... It is clear that foreign capital will be only of little value to the national economy, though crucial to some sectors like infrastructure ... While the declared agenda [of every nation] is free trade, the undeclared, but actual agenda is economic nationalism. India too must follow its own national agenda. This spirit is Swadeshi (BJP Election Manifesto, 1998, 2).

In cautious language, the remainder of the document embraces the phrase “calibrated globalization” (BJP Election Manifesto, 1998, 3). The BJP’s rhetoric appeared to suggest that although internal liberalization would continue, the state would intervene to protect Indian industry from foreign competition and would regulate external influence in the economy.

As an integral part of its Hindu nationalist orientation, the BJP regards itself as the party “with a difference,” rejecting communism and capitalism as “foreign models,” preferring instead one that is rooted in the country’s indigenous traditions. Yet despite the pre-election rhetoric of *swadeshi*, external economic liberalization continued during the BJP’s tenure from 1998 to 2004. Not only did the BJP fail to modify the policies of its predecessors but it systematically accelerated globalization.¹ Why did the BJP pursue policies of external economic liberalization despite suggestions otherwise? And why did a party with a stated economic nationalist agenda pursue decisively internationalist policies? These questions are of enormous significance, given that the BJP is alleged to have lost the 2004 national elections because of its stance on globalization and its moderation of its *Hindutva* agenda. Ultimately what can observers expect from a future BJP-led administration?

Two possible explanations for this apparent contradiction are worth noting: international pressures and the centrist pull of the Indian political system, which will be addressed later. The argument I advance however, will be that of ideological flexibility, which suggests that *swadeshi* was designed to appeal to intra-party elements and to carve out an electoral space in response to the liberalizing agenda of the opposition. This energized the activists within the party and brought electoral success.² Upon assuming office, the leadership switched positions to appeal to the middle class, which embraced globalization.

ECONOMIC HISTORY

India’s period of liberalization from 1991 onwards was distinct from earlier attempts in that it was more far reaching and reflected a repudiation of the Nehruvian model, which advocated state planning, autarky, government regulation, and expenditure alongside the private sector in a mixed economy.

¹ Several scholars have affirmed this view. See Hasan 2002, 18; see also Nayar 2001.

² Economic policy had not yet entered the arena of mass politics, as I will point out; thus the party’s gains owed more to activity amongst its organizational wing rather than the electorate’s approval of its position.

India became a closed economy based on import-substitution industrialization, which called for the protection of domestic industries with state investment in capital-goods industries. Planners practiced export pessimism, discounting the notion of using trade and export earnings to fuel growth. Foreign exchanges reserves were therefore limited. Although the entire apparatus rested on import controls and trade restrictions, India would repeatedly come to rely on foreign aid to continue food imports and maintain public investment. After Nehru's death in 1964, India implemented further protectionist measures and liberalized incrementally for the next two and a half decades.

The 1991 financial crisis, triggered by oil price increases and shrinking sources of capital, was exacerbated by the country's fiscal and current account deficits. India nearly defaulted on its foreign loans twice—its reserves being sufficient to pay for less than two weeks worth of imports (Nayar 2001, 140). A drastic cut in expenditures, a devaluation of the rupee by 20%, and an International Monetary Fund (IMF) standby loan of \$1.6 billion stemmed the crisis (Ghosh 1998, 324, Nayar 2001, 141). The government also instituted a structural adjustment program, the New Economic Policy (NEP), which cut tariffs, reduced quantitative restrictions on imports and exports, devalued the rupee, and liberalized rules for foreign investments (See Frankel 1999, 1). Liberalization slowed as the crisis abated, but it nevertheless continued under the successor United Front government from 1996 to 1998.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

With respect to external economic reforms, the BJP had three broad alternatives available when it assumed power in 1998 in the midst of a domestic and international climate more conducive to liberalization: Alternative I, to “roll-back” reforms; Alternative II, to remain static; and Alternative III, to press forward. Table 1 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of adopting each from the BJP's standpoint.

	Alternative I ("Roll back")	Alternative II ("Remain static")	Alternative III ("Press forward")
Pro	Tenuous nature of reforms Pleases swadeshi contingent	Satisfies swadeshi contingent Conforms to pre- election BJP rhetoric	Pleases domestic and foreign advocates of globalization
Con	International backlash	Lukewarm international response	Contradicts BJP rhetoric Upsets swadeshi contingent
Likelihood	Low	High	Medium

Table 1: BJP's Policy Alternatives

Alternative I was a possibility since past reforms had been incremental. However, a reversal would have invited an international backlash given increased levels of global economic integration in the 1990s. Assuming that the costs of a full reversal might be high, it would be prudent to eliminate Alternative I from consideration.

Alternative II, a compromise approach, merged closely with the BJP's rhetoric. Moreover, segments of Indian industry had forcefully argued in favor of calibrated globalization. The government could implement reforms in areas where the process had already begun, or where it was bound by international treaties, and refrain from activity in others. Alternative II was both feasible and politically viable. If one accepts the sincerity of BJP rhetoric, then this approach appears to be the most reasonable of the three paths.

Therefore the actual policy that followed, Alternative III, appears least likely given the presence of a solid alternative. Although Alternative III pleased globalization advocates, it contradicted party rhetoric and upset swadeshi's adherents, who were important members of the party.

BJP'S REVERSALS

The BJP reversed its positions on several issues after the 1998 election, in particular with the use of the term "swadeshi." Meaning "of one's own country," swadeshi was popularized in the early years of the freedom struggle

by Mahatma Gandhi, who had promoted the use of “khadi,” or hand woven cloth rather than imported textiles.³ It was later appropriated by Hindu nationalists as a guiding philosophy. The BJP initially equated swadeshi with “calibrated globalization.” After the elections, however, Finance Minister Yaswant Sinha gave it a different spin:

Now, India must be a powerful economic nation to match its military might, and the only way you can become an economic power is by being able to test your strengths against others. Which means going out into the world and competing—or letting the world come in and compete ... I understand swadeshi basically as a concept which will make India great. And India can only be great when we become an economic superpower ... We can be great by being able to compete. I think competition is the essence ... And therefore, swadeshi, globalizer, and liberalizer are not contradictions in terms. I personally think that globalization is the best way of being swadeshi (Nayar 2001, 252).

Swadeshi was now synonymous with globalization, which was seen as a means of projecting India’s strength. It was symptomatic of a shift in rhetoric among the party’s top leadership and a clear attempt to mask a change in policy as a form of continuity.

The 1998 election manifesto noted that there would be “little room for foreign investments” and that the BJP would discourage investment in “low-priority” areas, channeling them towards critical sectors (like infrastructure) (BJP Election Manifesto, 1998). Once elected, however, the new government failed to designate low priority sectors and even encouraged foreign investment in new areas.

While in opposition, the BJP blocked the Insurance Regulatory Authority (IRA) bill in 1997 which sought to privatize the state-run insurance industry and invite foreign investment—opposing it because it allowed foreign firms to enter the Indian market. Nevertheless, the BJP twice promoted and eventually passed a bill privatizing the insurance industry, allowing up to 40% foreign equity in the newly deregulated market.

In 1995, the BJP campaigned against widening the General Agreement for Trade and Tariffs (GATT), which would create the World Trade

³ The first swadeshi movement took place in late nineteenth century Bengal on a similar basis but it was Gandhi who took it further, transforming the Congress party into a mass movement in the process.

Organization (WTO). The party also opposed the introduction of product patents in compliance with the WTO's Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, and argued that the reduction of customs duties should be conducted on a "case-by-case basis" (Ghosh 2001, 288). In parliament, the BJP blocked the Patents Amendment Act allowing for product, rather than process, patents. Yet in 1998, the BJP passed the Patents Bill (with support from the opposition Congress party), ushering in the very product patents they had opposed, and aggressively moved to phase out customs duties.

A quick summary of the BJP's reversals is listed in Table 2 below.

In opposition	In power
Supported deregulation of the Indian insurance industry but opposed foreign entry	Introduced IRDA Bill in 1998 (passed in 1999) deregulating industry with up to 40% foreign equity
Opposed amending Patent laws to allow for product rather than process patents	Passed Patents Bill (1998) instituting product rather than process patents
Opposed Dunkel Draft of GATT to create WTO	Remained in WTO; Moved aggressively to phase out custom duties and loosen restrictions on imports
Advocated restrictions on FDI in non-priority areas, while channeling it into priority areas (hi-tech, infrastructure)	Failed to designate non-priority areas for FDI, allowed investment in a broad range of industries including liquor and tobacco
Swadeshi is defined as economic nationalism (ensuring a "level playing field" for Indian industry)	Swadeshi is defined as globalization (competing in the world economy)

Table 2: BJP in Opposition v. Power

IDEOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

Policy reversals can be potentially very costly, particularly in a vibrant democracy like India.⁴ Understanding why the BJP switched its position

⁴ Since 1977 there have been eight different parliaments, and the ruling party has only been returned to office twice. 1977 marked the end of de facto one party rule. See Election Commission of India.

requires understanding why it deployed swadeshi in the first place and examining how it managed to avoid a potential electoral backlash.

Thomas Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot distinguish between a pragmatic wing within the BJP that is concerned with power and patronage, and another ideological wing concerned with ideological purity (See Hansen 1999, 2001 and Jaffrelot 1996). The former represents the younger and more recent converts who joined due to dissatisfaction with existing parties or for political gain. Members of the latter group, the ideological wing, are older, have typically emerged from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS or Association of National Volunteers), and are more firmly wedded to the ideas of cultural and economic nationalism. It is a split between a “pragmatic pro-capitalist outlook” and an “austere ideologically pure, more socially conscientious” one (Hansen 2001, 306). The split also reflects the two different organizational cultures from which both sides emerge—that of a political party concerned with the capture and exercise of power in the case of the pragmatic wing and a religiously-based social movement in the case of the ideological wing. The pragmatists view economics and culture as existing on two different planes, allowing one to be pursued while relegating the other. The ideologues on the other hand, see both as an integrated whole.

Swadeshi is a protean and nimble philosophy that was used to differentiate the BJP from Congress and connect with public anxiety about the effects of globalization. Within the BJP, swadeshi reflected the interests of ideologues and neatly dovetailed with Hindutva (“Hinduness”), a form of ethnic and cultural nationalism.

The emphasis on swadeshi was partly a reaction to what the party considered an appropriation of their agenda—given that the BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh, had long opposed state intervention in the economy along Nehruvian lines. The rhetoric was therefore a calculated political move. As P.N. Vijay—Convenor of the BJP’s Economic Cell—notes on the party’s apparent contradictions: “its politics...in many issues, we are a political party ... and we want to make life difficult for the opposition.”⁵ Jaffrelot points out that swadeshi was also a re-orientation of BJP electoral strategy—towards downplaying communal issues and emphasizing socio-economic concerns in a populist fashion (See Jaffrelot 1996; as a rejoinder see Venkatesan 2004.

⁵ Interview with P.N. Vijay.

SWADESHI AND HINDUTVA

As a grassroots movement, the RSS possessed vast networks of support and organizational strength, which gave it political power. With former RSS workers occupying senior leadership positions within the BJP, RSS channels of influence were strong. Members of the Sangh Parivar (family of Hindu nationalist organizations) were instrumental in the BJP's rise in the 1980s—during a period of increased appeals to Hindutva (Ghosh 2001, 95). Nevertheless, Hindutva had limits of acceptability as witnessed in the reaction to the 1992 Babri Masjid (mosque) demolition.⁶

The pragmatists needed to have greater control if the party was to govern—hence the choice of A.B. Vajpayee (thought of as a moderate) as the BJP's candidate for Prime Minister. Jay Dubashi, BJP economist and a former member of the party's National Executive, notes: "Vajpayee was never a Swadeshi man and everybody knew that he was not a Swadeshi man. Why then did he become Prime Minister? Because the RSS brass gave in for reasons of their own, reasons that have nothing to do with economic policies" (Dubashi 2002). The aftermath of the 1996 national elections was proof positive that the BJP had become a political untouchable given its association with the communal violence of the early 1990s and its close links to right wing Hindu organizations, a situation which needed to be remedied.⁷

COMMITMENT TO REFORMS

Once the party seized power, the pragmatists held greater leverage. With Vajpayee at the helm, the new government continued liberalization despite its prior stances.

In the first cabinet, several pragmatists or pro-reform alliance ministers were appointed to key economic posts. Among these were Industry Minister Sikander Bakht, Power Minister P.R. Kumaramangalam, Housing Minister Ram Jethmalani, and Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde of the Lok Shakti. Similarly, Jaswant Singh was initially nominated as Finance Minister,

⁶ Nationwide rioting ensued and the state's BJP Chief Minister was forced to resign. Three other BJP Chief Ministers were also dismissed by the Prime Minister and the RSS was temporarily banned.

⁷ The BJP won a plurality in the 1996 elections but was unable to form a stable government because it was characterized as being "Hindu nationalist," a label which ran against the country's secular foundations and made broad appeals very difficult.

a move blocked by the RSS because of Singh's pro-liberalization credentials.⁸ Singh was eventually selected as External Affairs Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, where he would shape economic policy in a less high-profile role. Although Yashwant Sinha, who joined the party in the early 1990's and had previously served as Finance Minister under a socialist Prime Minister, was initially selected for the post with the approval of the RSS. However, he quickly became a champion of reforms and was frequently criticized by the RSS for his policies.

The first budget—when an imported goods duty was levied and then halved—has been often characterized as “swadeshi.”⁹ This experience prompted members of the Prime Minister's office (PMO) and the Planning Commission to lean on Vajpayee to forcefully pursue liberalization. N.K. Singh and Brajesh Mishra, reform oriented career bureaucrats who had been appointed as Secretary and Principal Secretary in the PMO, were instrumental in this regard.

The decision to create two advisory councils—one on economics and the other on trade and industry—comprised of individuals favoring liberalization, signaled the party's intentions clearly. The first council included former Reserve Bank Governor I.G. Patel, Planning Commission member Arjun Sengupta, and former Finance Secretary and Planning Commission member Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who had pressed for reform in the 1990s. Ratan Tata, CEO of Tata Enterprises, Mukesh Ambani, head of Reliance, Kumar Mangalam Birla, head of the Birla Group, and N.R. Narayana Murthy of Infosys who were sympathetic to globalization were all present on the second council. Absent were ideologues Jay Dubashi, Jagdish Shettigar, and Bajaj Enterprises CEO Rahul Bajaj, an advocate of calibrated globalization.

With the Cabinet's decision to put forward bills on insurance and patents in 1998, the pragmatists took the upper hand and sidelined the ideologues on matters of economic policy. These moves indicated two important shifts: First, that decision-making had shifted towards the PMO; and second, that pragmatists like Singh would play important roles, despite the objections of ideologues.

⁸ At that point, Singh had no RSS ties and he was once affiliated with the discredited Swatantra (Freedom) party which stood for classical liberalism and was strongly anti-communist. See Cohen 2001.

⁹ The mere rollback of the special additional duty makes it difficult to sustain such an argument. See Nayar 2001.

REACTION FROM THE IDEOLOGUES

The pragmatists had to convince Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and Human Resource Development Minister M.M. Joshi, conduits to the ideological wing, of the necessity of reforms in order win support from the BJP Ministers in the government. Nevertheless, opposition still remained in the organizational and parliamentary wings of the party and amongst many in the broader Hindu nationalist movement (the Sangh Parivar), particularly the RSS and its “front organization,” the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM or National Awakening Forum). Over the course of several months the government weathered sharply worded resolutions open criticism from senior leaders in these groups, and nationwide workers’ strikes in protest of its economic policies. Vajpayee held firm and at the National Executive Council Meeting in January 1999 party leadership effectively silenced the opposition within the party and closed ranks by passing an economic resolution that expressed appreciation for the government’s efforts and “all but disavowed the mindset of economic nationalism” (Nayar 2001, 255). The resolution also endorsed the need for foreign participation in the insurance sector and the need to amend the patents act “out of obligations assumed under the previous government” (Frankel 1999, 34).

LOST ELECTIONS

In November 1998, the BJP lost state legislative elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi, which some attributed to a rise in onion prices—an anti-incumbency factor. However, Party President Kushabhau Thakre later suggested that the price increases themselves could not account for the electoral losses. Thakre pointed to organizational deficiencies and lack of discipline, conceding that the party and the RSS cadres had not mobilized their traditional voter base or explained the achievements of the government. Thakre added that if the BJP lost its distinctiveness, it would alienate its traditional vote base (Frankel 1999, 33).

MANAGING THE FALLOUT

Ashutosh Varshney correctly points out that external economic liberalization had not yet entered the discourse of “mass politics” in India, touching only a limited number of people (Varshney 1999 and Yadav and Singh 1996). Indian

politics has traditionally centered on issues of identity whereas economic questions are only salient when they deal with “bread and butter” concerns.¹⁰ Swadeshi energized the party’s base but external economic liberalization was not enough of an election issue to provoke a reaction from the public at large.

APPEASING THE SANGH

The BJP leadership diffused tensions within the Sangh Parivar by relying on the politics of compromise and coalition politics. Strict party discipline silenced the BJP’s own swadeshi contingent. Achin Vanaik comments:

Tensions undeniably exist between the virulent cultural nationalism of the RSS, traditionally associated with protectionism, and the BJP’s current pursuit of neo-liberal objectives. But they are containable, as the two wings of the Sangh operate a tactical division of labour: the BJP does not compromise too much on Hindutva; the RSS restrains itself on the NEP (Vanaik 2001).

Further concessions to the ideologues included cabinet seats and lip-service to Hindutva causes. The RSS and other members of the Sangh Parivar were crucial in turning out voters and therefore essential to the party’s electoral strategy. Similarly the RSS—given its political extremism—was limited to engagement with the BJP. Both sides understood that they had few alternatives.

The BJP also skillfully linked economic and cultural nationalism by using their decision to go nuclear as a cover for their economic policy. The chief complaint about external economic liberalization was that it would entail “selling off” the country. In this regard, the BJP’s decision to test nuclear weapons in May 1998—signaling India’s arrival as a nuclear power—strengthened the hand of the reform faction. The nuclear explosions were greeted with euphoria within the Sangh Parivar for having displayed Indian power and assured its status in the world. This gave the pragmatists the space with which they could continue reforms. Swapan Dasgupta remarks: “The liberalization process was accelerated by the blasts ... it allowed the government to run roughshod over internal misgivings about

¹⁰ There is evidence that identity is becoming less important. See Oldenburg 1999.

liberalization” for it had now proven its nationalist credentials and could hardly be accused of eroding the country’s sovereignty.¹¹

COALITION POLITICS

The decline of Congress and the rise of regional parties meant that coalition politics had become the norm by the 1990s. Slim margins of victory and alliance fluidity meant that these smaller parties had a hand in shaping policy and securing ministerial seats. Eighteen parties made up the ruling alliance in 1998, a year in which there was a clear muting of Hindutva (See Election Commission of India). Hindutva’s relegation to the back-burner only further strengthened the hand of the pragmatists and enhanced their ability to pursue liberalization.

MIDDLE CLASS VOTERS

The BJP’s growing popularity among the Indian middle class, which sought a reduced role for the state, can be attributed heavily to its stance on liberalization and decentralization. The Jana Sangh had long been considered a party of the upper-castes. Given the rough correlation of caste with class and income, the party drew from the upper end of the socio-economic spectrum. The BJP continued to attract this segment, although it also found a constituency among the emerging Indian middle class.

Vernon Hewitt estimates the middle class at 10% of the population, while others place the figure somewhere between 7% and 12% (Hewitt 2000, 7-8). Pradeep Chhibber clearly demonstrates the connection between this group and the BJP, pointing out that “the electoral success of the BJP hence lay not in mobilizing only the ‘religious’ but in its ability to put together a viable coalition between religious Hindus and those disaffected by excessive political intervention in the economy” (Chhibber 1997, 631). Members of the middle class were therefore attracted to the BJP because of its economic policies.

The rise of the middle class was a product of the consumption-led growth pattern and steps towards deregulation taken by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s. The middle class came to believe in modernization and rapid development, and sought access to imports along with wider consumer choice.

¹¹ Interview with Swapan Dasgupta.

Jaffrelot observes how the ideas and mindset of this group developed: “Its system of values was based in theory at least—on merit gained through hard work and thus its members showed little concern for the social needs of the lower classes and were antagonistic to the very principle of reservations...” (Jaffrelot 1996, 432). Rajni Kothari has also highlighted the affinities which exist between this mentality and Hindu nationalism.

The new elite that has emerged and follows those in command in the global framework no longer tries to keep up the socialist rhetoric but is following the capitalist path. They, in fact, bluntly say that those millions of people who are left out are in fact a drag. They are the source of continuous demand, continuous noise ... This includes the poor, the under privileged communities in the ethnic sense, the tribals, the dalits, the former untouchables and it includes the religious minorities (Jaffrelo 1996, 432).

The new elite became receptive to appeals by the BJP, which opposed caste-based reservations and “pseudo secularism,” adopting the slogan: “one nation, one culture, one people.” Ironically, although many in this social class were products of the reform process initiated by successive Congress governments, they came to identify these governments with corruption, instability, violence, pampering of minorities and economic failure. It was the BJP’s Hindutva agenda, therefore, that differentiated itself from Congress (the BJP’s chief opposition at the federal level) for many in this middle class demographic. A vote for the BJP was seen as a vote for economic decentralization and for bolstering the country. Hewitt remarks,

India Today noted that these [so-called “saffron clad yuppies”] upwardly mobile young were increasingly impatient with the need to provide extensive anti-poverty, ‘development’ programmes. In the wake of events throughout the 1980s, they became potential supporters of the idea that the minorities ought to be taught a lesson (Hewitt 2000, 8).

Fearing marginalization at home, this group also feared marginalization abroad. “Explicit in these criticisms was the conviction that the countries of East Asia were prosperous because they had forged powerful and homogenous cultural ‘states’ which had proved supportive of powerful capitalist economies” (Hewitt 2000, 10). Thus, the BJP carefully nuanced its rhetoric while in opposition, calling for calibrated globalization and stressing

internal liberalization—giving no indication that it would reverse economic reforms.

Swadeshi can also be interpreted as a language of power that appealed to the Indian middle class. This group was a strong base of support for the BJP, which articulated its fears and concerns. Vijay points out, “we are very much influenced by domestic constituencies ... by our perception of what the voter wants...In that, we are not different from any other party in the world.”¹² The fact that reforms had not yet entered the realm of mass politics allowed the party to pursue external economic liberalization while employing other tactics to garner votes among the rest of the population. In this regard, the party was also aided by the strength of its alliances with regional parties.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Systemic arguments exist in two varieties. The first follows “hyperglobalism” which suggests that the “impersonal forces of world markets ... are now more powerful than the states to whom ultimate political authority over society and economy is supposed to belong” (Strange 1999, 3). According to this line, increasing levels of globalization and heightening interdependence shrink the decision-making capacities of states. Deregulated financial markets and integrated production structures are said to dissipate national boundaries and render national economic strategies increasingly anachronistic. Market forces therefore effectively dictated the BJP’s hand.

The weakness inherent in this argument is that it does not have an adequate theory of agency. States may well be retreating in favor of markets, but stories of the state demise in a country that had undergone forty years of protectionism are exaggerated. Some even take issue with the characterization of liberalization as a retreat of the state. Jayati Ghosh argues:

There is often a common misconception that liberalizers argue for a reduction in government’s control over the economy and can be successful in reducing the economic influence of the state. In reality, what occurs most frequently in liberalizing episodes is not an effective reduction in state involvement, but rather a change in its nature, with different groups benefiting or being adversely affected. The ‘withdrawal of the state’ in economic terms is a chimera ... (Ghosh 1998, 299).

¹² Interview with P.N. Vijay.

An alternative systemic explanation arises out of the globalization skeptic approach, which suggests that globalization simply involves heightened levels of internationalization. Globalization skeptics argue that pressure from developed countries, multinational corporations (MNCs), and international financial institutions (IFIs) formed a nexus in favor of the “Washington Consensus” to pressure the BJP.¹³

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the socialist paradigm in favor of free-market liberalism make the globalization skeptic approach more plausible. India was isolated after its nuclear tests. However, given its size and the scale of its economy, India was more insulated than other developing countries in the absence of an immediate crisis. Moreover, despite a consistent level of external pressure, liberalization had slowed in the mid-1990s as the economy had improved. Some also make the point that the sanctions imposed on India were of little significance. Kapur and Mehta underscore this:

Although they [the economic sanctions] had an adverse short-term impact on much needed infrastructure projects, they were soon restored. The sanctions also targeted loans from multilateral lending institutions, but the effects were quite limited ...(Kapur and Mehta 1999, 169-170).

The government’s success in raising \$4.2 billion from expatriate Indians through the Resurgent India Bonds (RIBs) further bolstered the economy in the face of sanctions.

Systemic factors may have constrained the BJP but were not decisive in shaping policy. They appear to suggest a passive country with little control over its economic direction. If the experience of India over the past fifty years is to serve as a guide, this depiction is far from true.

CENTRISM

Varshney points out that all parties are ultimately subject to a “centripetal” influence—the compulsions of governance moderating political behavior (Varshney 1995; see also Hasan 2002). Others have noted the country’s social diversity and political fragmentation as constraints on policies. Clearly centrism does matter in some fashion. The BJP’s increasing espousal of

¹³ Globalization skeptics cover a range of scholars from neo-realists to Marxists. See Strange 1999, 6.

socio-economic issues during the mid 1990s is evidence of this. Furthermore, alliances were necessary to govern and the BJP led coalition was only able to assume power in 1998 after an arrangement with the Telugu Dasam Party (TDP) of Andhra Pradesh, and TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu was a reformer at the state level. The resulting scenario left the BJP somewhat vulnerable.

Yet the BJP led coalition was also composed of parties like the socialist Samata Party (SAP), whose leader, George Fernandes, was named Defense Minister.¹⁴ Bound together by the spoils of office, the BJP had a fair range within which to maneuver, given the eclectic makeup of the coalition. The TDP lent its support to the party to thwart Congress, its rival in Andhra Pradesh. When the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) of Tamil Nadu left the coalition and brought down the government, it did so not out of policy differences with the government but because the BJP refused to accede to the demand of AIADMK leader, J. Jayalalitha, to remove the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, who was pressing corruption charges against her. Centrism therefore had little direct impact on liberalization.

CONCLUSION

Why did a party known for cultural nationalism carry the mantle of economic nationalism while in opposition, only to later pursue globalization? It is a story that is best understood in terms of aggregates: that of a right of center pragmatic capitalism, and of a far right nationalism the economic agenda of which converged with the left. The rhetoric of *swadeshi* was a ploy to energize “the base” while differentiating itself from and obstructing the ruling governments. Once in power, the pragmatists exerted their influence to continue liberalization and to satisfy the urban middle class. This group harbored a sense of “India’s greatness” and found the BJP’s articulation of power appealing. As this case suggests, nationalism and globalization are not necessarily opposing forces but sometimes self-reinforcing—in other words nationalism can facilitate movements which give rise to globalization and in turn feed back onto itself to create stronger national identities.¹⁵

Despite the BJP’s earlier willingness to play politics with economic policies, its tenure has firmly established the party’s pro-liberalization credentials, which will be very difficult to erase should it return to power in

¹⁴ As a Minister for Industry in 1977, Fernandes forced Coke and Pepsi to leave the country.

¹⁵ Rawi Abdelal has written about how nationalism can further globalization, in the context of the former Soviet Union. See Abdelal 2001.

the near future. Thus, a new BJP government can be expected to continue external economic liberalization, contingent on its coalition allies. However, as the 1998 state elections and the 2004 national elections suggest, suppressing Hindutva and continuing liberalization while relying on the RSS to draw votes is probably unsustainable. For the foreseeable future, the BJP will need to tone down appeals to Hindutva if it wants to govern, giving pragmatists control of the party's direction. But the pragmatists will have to develop an independent base of support or craft more successful alliances with regional parties if they hope to continue reform and also retain power. In a sense, this also speaks to the need for the pragmatists to more effectively communicate the perceived benefits of liberalization to the public at large, thereby moving globalization to the arena of mass politics and linking it to poverty alleviation. Absent that, one can expect to see the party caught in a very uncomfortable position in the near term: incrementally shifting to the right to shore up its activist base while trying its best to maintain a commitment to globalization.

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Social Action and Indian-Muslim Communities: Understanding Islamic Religious Plurality in India*

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of “Islamic pluralism” in India has been approached from a number of perspectives. Although a vast literature confirms the existence of a diverse Muslim community in India and numerous perceptions of “Islamic identities,” the ideologies and activities of Muslim social organizations working in different parts of the country have not been given adequate academic attention. The popular view that all the Muslim social organizations in India share a single common agenda and work to achieve certain common objectives for the well being of a single Muslim community still dominates academic discourse. Idioms such as “Islamic philanthropy”, “Muslim NGO sector” and “Muslim development sector” are frequently used to describe the activities of Muslim organizations in India. Even in recent years, a few attempts have been made to enumerate Muslim organizations and NGOs working in different parts of the country.¹ Despite the fact that such attempts are quite significant for analyzing social and economic status of Muslims in India, these studies do not answer basic conceptual issues. For instance, these efforts do not look at the historical patterns concerning the slow and gradual development of Muslim social organizations, and more specifically, the historical merger between the Islamic principles and multiple local identities at various levels. Moreover, these studies do not consider the importance of the ideology of Islamic organizations. In this sense, such explorations are unable to provide any analysis of the historical development of social actions among Muslim communities in India and the ideologies of different social groups. As a result, the social policy of the state, political actors, and even the

¹ The study commissioned by the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS), New Delhi on the Muslim social charitable organisations is the best example of this type of literature. For details see Ishaque (1999).

Third Sector in India tend to generalize the social activities of Muslim organizations in a single, closed category. It is true that there is a common ideological thread that connects the very basic premise of religious affiliation with these organizations, but social factors and cultural environment also determine the possibilities of several kinds of social action in various socio-cultural contexts.

This paper examines the idea of “Muslim homogeneity” in India from the perspective of Muslim social organizations. The prime concern of the paper is to study the ideologies and activities of selected Muslim organizations to develop a few analytical categories that could help us in understanding a “functional Islamic religious plurality” in India. Based on empirical research of eighteen organizations, I argue that the traditional dichotomy between “religious” and “secular” forms of social action can not explain the complex social world of Indian Muslims. Instead, I suggest the need to investigate the day-to-day life of Muslim communities, their concerns, and the historical growth of their social organizations.

It is important to clarify two important points. First, we are using the term “ideology” in a specific sense. In general, Islamic ideologies of Muslim organizations can simply be conceptualized as a set of ideas, assumptions, and beliefs that constitute the worldview of an individual or a social group. However, their understanding of Islam and the social status of concerned Muslim community, its problems, and the possible answers to tackle these social issues put these ideologies into action. Because Islam is an important organizing principle of social activities, different patterns of social action are manifested through these Islamic ideologies. I also imply the term “social action” in a specific sense that includes different forms of socio-political mobilizations of Muslim communities, the identification of social issues for action, the creation of an agenda of action-oriented activities, and the establishment of networks with different Muslim and non-Muslim social groups, as well as the state.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first two sections contextualize my research agenda, assessing the relevance of social organizations in studying socio-religious plurality and highlighting a few conceptual ambiguities in the conventional research paradigms related to Indian Muslims. The third section deals with the debate on Islamic identity in India and explores different approaches to Islamic plurality to develop a theoretical framework for empirical findings. The next two sections focus on empirical research in which I discuss the applied methodology for fieldwork and the outcomes of the empirical research. The final section classifies different Muslim organizations into different analytical categories on the basis

of their ideological stands and social activities. In the final section of the paper I examine the possibilities of further discussions on this topic.

MUSLIM SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ISLAMIC SOCIAL PLURALITY IN INDIA: THE QUESTION OF RELEVANCE

The unprecedented growth of voluntary organizations in India is an important development of the 1990s.² The “welfare state model,” which was adopted by the postcolonial policy makers as an instrument to achieve socio-economic progress of the country in the 1950s, has been replaced by a more *laissez-faire* model. This new state has already rolled back from the social sector, and the responsibility of social regeneration is being given to civil society organizations.³ In the backdrop of this fundamental change in the social policy, one needs to look at the changing roles of the Islamic organizations precisely for three basic reasons.

The first reason why Muslim social organizations are important is the alleged social backwardness of Indian Muslims has always been an important political issue in postcolonial India. It is true that several laws and governmental schemes have been introduced to tackle Muslim social backwardness, but the political appropriation of these laws and schemes makes them irrelevant. For example, the Constitution of India provides protection to religious and cultural minorities by recognizing the right to culture and freedom of religion

² The official policy discourse in India recognized the significance of non-governmental organizations for social development in the 1950s when the idea of ‘planned development’ was introduced. It was felt that the social development was left for the voluntary sector and the state should provide the technical and financial support. Following this logic of planned development the government established the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) for strengthening the voluntary sector in 1953. Furthermore, in every Five Year Plan the importance and potentials of the social sector were acknowledged and special funds were allotted for the voluntary sector (Sen 1993). However, in the 1990s, particularly during the Eighth Five Year Plan, a practical strategy-based action plan was worked out to bring a collaborative relationship between voluntary organizations and the government. The plan also envisaged setting up a national grid of voluntary institutions at the central level to provide them with a forum (Sooryamoorthy and Gangrade 2001, 49-51).

³ John Samuel and Gnana Prakasam point out that in the last ten years the per capita social sector expenditure has decreased substantially. For instance, the total expenditure of central and state governments on health as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (on current prices) has decreased from 1.25% in 1993–94 to 0.95% in 1996–97. The total expenditure on education as a percentage to GDP has decreased from 2.74% in 1993–94 to 2.49% in 1997–98. These figures show that the state has confined its activities and social development has been left for the civil society organizations. See for details (<http://www.ncasindia.org.country%20report.htm>).

as Fundamental Rights (Art 25–30). The state has also established several institutions, such as the Minority Commission and the Minority Finance Development Corporation, for the welfare of religious and cultural minorities. But these constitutional provisions and the state’s so-called commitment to an affirmative action do not focus on the real conditions of Indian-Muslim communities. Maitery Bordia Das’s study on the “Ethnicity and Job Outcomes in India” highlights the fact that despite having “reservation in jobs for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and a number of educational and employment benefits for religious minorities (particularly the Muslims) that are implemented through special agencies, these social groups are continuously marginalized or excluded from development” (Das 2003, 1). Das points out that the Special Task Force on Employment Opportunities, commissioned by the government in 2001, did not assess the role of social exclusion in job opportunities and further argues that it is important to review the existing economic and social developmental data from a sociological point of view. The findings of the India Human Development Report also substantiate this argument. According to this report, the average annual income of a Muslim household is Rs. 22807, and the per capita annual income of an Indian Muslim is Rs. 3678. If these figures are compared with those of all India, a real disparity is found in the national average. According to the report, the average annual income of an Indian household is Rs. 25653, and the annual per capita income of an Indian is Rs. 4485. These figures reveal that Muslim communities are still far behind average national living standards in India. (India: Human Development Report, 1999).

Political groups look at this question of Muslim backwardness from their own ideological lenses. The right wing Hindutva political groups for example have been campaigning against the special religious and cultural rights given to religious minorities. They reject such affirmative actions on the grounds that these provisions violate the principle of equality. For them, these protections of minorities reflect a kind of political appeasement.⁴ The popular

⁴ The organizational documents of the RSS, the VHP and the BJP, suggest an interesting point. One finds an unquestionable adherence to constitutional secularism. The problem, these documents argue, lies in the discriminatory nature of some provisions of the constitution that provide unlimited and unrestricted freedom to minorities (http://www.rss.org/New_RSS/Mission_Vision/RSS_on_Minorties.jsp). Political parties, particularly Congress, these documents point out, have been using these provisions to appease the minorities. As a result, a sense of separatism among minorities has developed (Hindu Agenda, Point 3, Published by the VHP see (http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/f.Hindu_Agenda/HinduAgenda_E.htm)). The true feelings of nationalism are possible only when these constitutional provisions related to minorities are abolished. This is precisely the line of argument that links rights of minorities with separatism.

assumption that the separate Muslim personal laws are responsible for the population growth of the country stem from Hindutva campaigns and are often linked to the question of unemployment and the backwardness of the country.⁵ In brief, the Muslims are held responsible for India's overall slow progress.

On the other hand, the centrists, secularist-leftists, and most importantly the so-called Muslim community leaders portray a politically consciousness and socially closed image of a single Indian-Muslim community. Despite the fact that poverty and unemployment are the most important issues for Muslims, the Muslim community is always portrayed as a vigilant political actor. Nevertheless, the decline in social expenditure has directly affected the Muslim population, particularly the majority of Muslims who live below the poverty line. Despite this fact, Muslim political and social leaders have not taken a stand on these issues. I have not found any serious response from the so-called social and political leaders of the community on the most controversial social concerns such as health care, poverty, and unemployment. It is imperative to talk about the role of social organizations, and their real concerns, and practical problems in the present context when the Third Sector is supposed to play an important role in the social sphere of the country. The investigation of different practical resolves, I believe, would reflect the religious-social plurality and its actual manifestations.

Secondly, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States and the Western-initiated "war against terror" have made this issue much more pertinent. In popular discourse, terrorism is made out to be synonymous with Islam. In India, this "internationalization" of Islamic terrorism was used particularly by the rightist Hindutva groups to target the Muslim social establishments. The policies of the previous Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government directly and indirectly questioned the "nationalist trustworthiness" of Muslim social organizations. The government officially banned the Student Islamic Movement in India (SIMI) and the Dindar Anjuman for their alleged role in spreading terrorism.⁶

⁵ Analyzing the differential growth rates of Hindus and Muslims in India, P. H. Reddy argues that the Muslim population growth is still seen as a point of controversy (Reddy 2003). Nine of the political groups - the Hindu fundamentalist, secularists, and the Muslim community leaders raise the question of Muslim population as a practical social problem. See also Shahabuddin (2001).

⁶ On 3 May, 2001, the Government officially banned the *Dindar Anjuman*. It is alleged that some members of the Muslim group called *Deendar Channabasaveshwara Siddique*, an organization related to the *Dindar Anjuman*, were responsible for Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh church bombings in 2000. The International Religious Freedom Report 2002, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, US Department of State notes "the fact that a Muslim group responsible for the bombing of Christian churches was unusual." Some observers have

Large organizations such as the Jami'at-i-'Ulama-yi Hind and Dar al-'ulum Deoband, which had played a significant role in the freedom struggle, faced immense social and political pressures. The small madrasas in different states were targeted as potential terrorist hideouts. Thus, the state policy quite wittingly implied that "the Muslim community" was responsible for most ongoing anti-India activities. In this political atmosphere, it is important to highlight Islamic social plurality and the contributions of Muslim organizations in India.

The self-perception of the Muslim community, as propagated by the Muslim leadership as well as the secular state, is the third important factor that makes the role of Muslim organizations significant. It is generally believed that the Muslim community in India is facing a multidimensional crisis. All Muslim organizations, irrespective of their ideological differences, and the state-run Muslim institutions, such as the Minority Commission and the Waqf Boards, share the common presumption that inescapable historical, political, cultural, and of course, religious reasons are responsible for the present socio-political decline of the Muslim community in India. In fact, the entire political discourse of Muslim leadership is based on this line of thought. A Quranic interpretation is also used to substantiate this argument. The *Quran* predicts a linear historical sequence in which the past is always imagined as superior to the present; the self-destructive nature of the present social and material world will lead to its own gradual obliteration. Thus, the present is always imagined as an age of predicament and crisis.⁷ In the remaining paper I will discuss the following questions: How is this crisis syndrome understood by the Islamic communities in India? and What is being done by the community social organisations to come out of it?

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ISLAMIC SOCIAL PLURALITY IN INDIA?

Any attempt to characterize Islamic plurality in India has to confront at least three types of conceptual ambiguities. First, there is a general ignorance

compared the vigorous investigation and prosecution of *Deendar* members for attacks against Christians with general lack of vigor in the investigation and prosecution of Hindus accused of carrying out attacks against Christians." See the International Religious Freedom Report (2002).

⁷ Ayesha Jalal, analysing Urdu poetry of the late 1850s and the identity formation of Indian Muslim community, argues that this poetry reflects a deep sense of defeat and depression among the upper caste Muslims in north India (Jalal, 2001). This crisis had a direct relationship with Islamic religious thought and the *Quran* was reinterpreted for legitimacy for this new social context.

about various Indian Islamic religious traditions that contributed to the evolution and growth of different philanthropic traditions in South Asia. These Indo-Islamic traditions represent a gradual interaction of various religious ideas.⁸ Over the course of time, most of these traditions were modernized in response to growing social demands, unfortunately there is not sufficient historical and sociological information to map out the different trajectories of these important changes.

The lack of historical-sociological data on Indian-Islamic philanthropic traditions leads to the second conceptual ambiguity: the tendency to quantify social, educational, and political backwardness of Indian Muslims in contemporary India. The quantification of social backwardness is an important task for understanding the social exclusion of any particular community.⁹ Nevertheless, the mere quantification of social backwardness on the basis of conventional social indicators shows a comprehensive socio-economic condition of “an Indian-Muslim community,” that does not allow one to look at the internal social complexities. As a result, there is no information on caste-class relationship among Muslims, the traditional economy of Muslim craftsmen in small towns, and the rural economy of land owning Muslim classes.

The third major conceptual problem is related to the ideological positions of Muslim organizations. As I pointed out earlier, the literature on Muslim social organizations concerns listing these organizations and their activities, but lacks information about the ideological positions and philosophical outlooks of different social organizations. It is true that the “Islamic content” of the ideologies of Muslim organizations always influence their perspectives. It would be inappropriate nevertheless to take universally accepted Islamic religious practices and ideals, such as performing *namāz* or paying *zakāt* as prescribed by the *Quran*, as salient features to assess the Islamic-ness of any organization. On the contrary, we find a variety of interpretations of these ideals at local levels. In general, as we shall see, the Islamic content in the activities of Muslim organizations swings like a

⁸ Richard Eaton’s seminal works on Indian Islamic traditions challenge the stereotypes associated with the south Asian Islamic traditions. For instance his argument on conversion to Islam replies to both the Hindutva theory of forced conversion and the secularist theory of social equality. Eaton suggests that in pre-colonial India the conversion to Islam was a slow, gradual process. It therefore went largely unnoticed by either inside or outside observers. (Eaton 2003, 17-18).

⁹ Here I note the contribution of the Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi. The IOS’s study on the socio-economic profile of Muslims in Delhi is a notable example of quantitative research on Indian Muslims (See Munshi 1996).

pendulum. The idealized, textual based, so-called high Islam is one extreme of this swing, while the traditions of localized Islam are the other end.

THE DEBATE ON ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN INDIA

Let us now look at the debate on Islamic identity and the plurality of Muslim communities in South Asia and India. Broadly speaking, there are three different positions on Islamic identity. Imtiaz Ahmad argues that a synthesis has been worked in South Asia between the high Islamic ideals and custom-centric traditions, allowing them to coexist as complementary and integral parts of a common religious system. Ahmad's thesis is the theoretical foundation for four volumes of essays by various authors he edited on different social aspects of Muslim communities in South Asia. T. N. Madan's work on Kashmiri-Muslim identity also identifies the existence of "dual social orders which are accommodated within one overarching framework" (Madan 1972). Paul Brass and Mushirul-Hasan developed this assimilation thesis in two different directions. Brass's earlier work emphasizes that the idea of a single Muslim community is often linked with certain political symbols which are appropriated by the Muslim elite for its own vested interests (Brass 1979, 35-77). His later work on ethnic violence, however, identifies a few socially institutionalized communal networks that promote different forms of collective violence in India (Brass 2002). Mushirul-Hasan regards the "follower of Islam not as a religious collectivity, homogenous and structured, but as a disparate, differentiated and stratified segment of society" (Hasan 1997, 21).

Francis Robinson, however, takes a different position. For him, a tendency towards a perfect and pure Islam has always been present among Muslims of South Asia (Robinson 1983). The political conduct of these communities in India is associated with idealized Islamic values. Farzana Shaikh extends this argument and attempts to trace the notion of Islamic community during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in India (Shaikh 1989, 9).

More recently, Richard Eaton has developed an argument that accommodates the assimilation thesis as well as its adversaries. Eaton argues that there was a "historical double movement" that shaped Islamic identity in South Asia. The "Indo-Islamic traditions that grew and flourished between 711 and 1750 served both to shape Islam to the regional cultures of South Asia and to connect Muslims of those cultures to a world wide faith community" (Eaton 2003, 6).

Let us explore the intellectual contributions of these three positions. The assimilation thesis suggests that the local cultural environment influences the

social identity of Muslims. The regional configuration of Islam and local social practices, the dialects of modernity and its assimilation project, and the structural dynamics of power at every level of society overlap in a variety of ways. Robinson's argument on the other hand reminds us that Islam as an ideology provides the bedrock for these varied forms. A commitment to the supremacy of one god, "Allah", its scripture called the "Quran," faith in the prophet-hood of Mohammad, and an imagined conception of a universal community can easily be identified. The actual conduct of Muslim societies, Robinson seems to suggest, is based on a high, textual Islam. Richard Eaton's argument is a synthesis of the first two positions. The interpretations of texts such as the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the prophet), the hierarchy of social order, and the economic and political power structures vary from one place to another. Islamic identity, Eaton argues, reflects a simultaneous "double movement." In the following section, I will examine the implication of this double movement. I place my empirical findings in this framework and consider different categories of Islamic social organizations.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTOURS OF ISLAMIC PLURALITY IN INDIA

My findings are based on a research project entitled "Islamic philanthropy in India: A Study of Selected Muslim Organizations." It was a large research project that looked at unexplored dimensions of Islamic philanthropy in India. The fieldwork was conducted in three phases in different parts of India. Because this survey of Islamic organizations was a demanding task and could not be covered in the given one year time period, I tried to accommodate all the major socio-religious organizations and Islamic sects in our sample. However, I could not manage to produce a balanced picture. Thus, the organizations that were selected on regional basis were subsequently divided on the bases of their work and their ideological resolves. Initially, I decided to study twenty-four Muslim organizations. However, only eighteen organizations could be approached.

I prepared a semi-structured questionnaire for collecting the primary data. I also used participant observation for exploring some of the specific issues related to particular groups and organizations. A historical approach was adopted to learn more about the various Islamic philanthropic traditions in India. Focus group discussions and individual interviews were also conducted. The published literature of different organizations was also given importance. In the case of state-run Muslim organizations, I had to rely on state-published information, such as official documents and annual reports, government departments.

I focused on four issues: the origin of the organization, the formal structure, activities, and the general perceptions about the Muslim situation at local, regional, national level and the proposed practical solutions. On the basis of this collected data and fieldwork, I identified five types of Muslim organizations in India:

- Indigenous-local Islamic organizations
- Islamic religious social organizations
- Liberal modernist social organizations
- Liberal political organizations and pressure groups
- State administered Muslim organizations/institutions

Indigenous-Local Islamic Organizations

The small local *madrasas*, small *dargahs*, and caste and *biradari panchayats* come under the category of indigenous-local Islamic organizations. These organizations basically function at the very bottom level of society and perform three kinds of activities:

- (a) Ritualistic activities, such as managing the local religious sites and organizing religious festivals;
- (b) Imparting religious education and running local level *madrasas* or primary schools;
- (c) Responding to social and cultural concerns of the Muslim community.

It is difficult to draw a line between the religious activities and the social work of these organizations. Most of the local religious organizations look at the social issues as religious concerns. Social work is not a secular activity for them; rather, it is a religious activity and has obvious religious purposes. Similarly, it is not possible to point out any particular model for these local Islamic organizations, because of the local cultural environment and the specific issues of concerned social groups. It is quite evident that the indigenous socio-cultural practices are merged with Islamic principles, instilling them with new meanings. For instance, we find that the nature of rural Kashmiri local organizations is different from the organizations working in the southern part of Kerala. In Kashmir, the Rishi-Sufi tradition has a great influence on local level *dargahs* or *madrasas*. In Kerala, however, local Muslim organizations are much concerned with primary education, responding to the larger social agenda. These small organizations collect

money from local people and work on a small scale. We find that caste, *biradaris* and sects are the most important determining factors at local levels. These factors influence the local Islamic rituals and social activities.

Religious Islamic Social Organizations

Traditional religious organizations, such as the large *madrasas* and *dargahs* which have modified the traditional forms of religious philanthropy to utilize their resources for social development, can be labelled religious Islamic social organizations. Historically speaking, some of these organizations emerged from the traditional religious institutions and were established to carry out developmental work.

In our survey three large *madrasas*, the Dar al-'ulum Deoband, the Nadwat al-'ulum in Lucknow, and Jami'at-i'Ulama-yi Hind in Jaipur, and the two major *dargahs*, Bima Palli dargah in Kerala and the *Dargah Khwaja Saheb* in Ajmer, were included and categorized as religious Islamic social organizations.

The fundamental objective of these institutions, like the indigenous local organizations, is not to do social development work in the modern sense of the term. Their prime aim is religious work; social developmental work is considered an extension of the religious work. Our findings suggest that religious Islamic social organizations are engaged in four types of activities:

- (a) Providing higher Islamic education and conducting research in Islamic and Arabic disciplines, while offering limited modern education including computer education
- (b) Managing religious and ritualistic activities
- (c) Managing health services for the local population
- (d) Publication of religious literature

Religious Islamic social organizations receive donations and offerings. These organizations, particularly *dargahs*, rely upon devotees. Large *madrasas* have a different system of fund collection. For example, Darul-Uloom Deobad has an organized system of collection and fundraising. This *madrasa* appoints thirty-two paid *safirs* (representatives) for collecting the funds. These *safirs*

visit different mosques throughout India and collect money. *Zakāt* is also a source of funding for religious social organizations.¹⁰

Liberal-Modernist Islamic Organizations

The third form of Islamic organization I call liberal-modernist Islamic organizations. Large Muslim NGOs, educational and health institutions, and the Muslim financial institutions are placed in this category. These organizations are established primarily to do social work in Muslim communities. These institutions try to manage the available resources for the well-being of the concerned community. I collected information about three institutions: the Al-Amin in Bangalore, Jamia Hamdard in New Delhi, and the Muslim Association in Triventrappuram, Kerala.

These institutions are engaged in a variety of social activities. For analytical purposes I divide these activities into four categories:

- (a) Providing modern higher education and research on Muslim issues and development of community resources
- (b) Providing medical services and research in traditional medicine, particularly the area related to Islamic knowledge
- (c) Establishing financial institutions like Islamic banks for providing financial help to local and needy Muslims
- (d) Publication of literature

The liberal-modernist organizations generate money from different sources such as public collections, special collections from affluent Muslims, NRIs, and the state. However, a few organizations such as the Al-Amin in Bangalore have made themselves self-sufficient. Their economic institutions provide sufficient funds for carrying out developmental activities. Their educational institutions also generate money through fees and donations. The financial support from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) encourages some of these organizations to work in the fields of education and health. Affiliations with different universities, special support from the state-run minority institutions, and joint projects with government and non-governmental institutions help these organizations function on a large scale.

¹⁰ There are two kinds of charities in Islam, *obligatory* charity and the *voluntary* charity. *Zakat* is an obligatory form of charity. Every well-off Muslim (Saheb-i-Mall) who possesses property equal to or exceeding a minimum exemption limit (*Nisab*), has to pay *zakāt* at the prescribed rate. *Waqf*, on the other hand, is not obligatory. It is a voluntary charity dedicated to the welfare of the community.

Liberal Political Organizations and Pressure Groups

The Muslim political organizations and pressure groups such as the Jama'at-i-Islam-i-Hind and the Jami'at-i-'Ulama-yi Hind represent the fourth type of Islamic organizations in India. Like other pressure groups, these organizations lobby the political parties for their interests. They also work as organized NGOs and provide education and health services to Muslims. This makes them different from traditional pressure groups. These organizations are based on certain political-ideological principles. The shared ideologies of these groups include the conviction that Muslims in India represent a sizeable minority, and the belief that proper implementation of constitutional provisions related to minority rights would secure Muslim interests in India. These organizations strive for legislative measures to achieve maximum political space for Muslims. More broadly, liberal political organizations work in the following areas:

- (a) Political work that includes lobbying political parties, supporting or opposing candidates in elections, mobilizing Muslims for specific issues and peace work during communal crises
- (b) Publishing general Islamic literature and literature related to Indian Muslims, such as the role of Muslim personal law in India and communal riots in India
- (c) Providing Islamic education and modern primary education and conducting research on Muslim issues
- (d) Organizing and conducting humanitarian relief work particularly during natural disasters
- (e) Providing health services to a limited population

Liberal political organizations collect donations from their backers and sympathizers. Publication of Islamic literature is an important source of their income.

State Administered Muslim Institutions

Waqf institutions, welfare schemes run by the Minority Commission, and the Minority Financial Development Corporation are also related to the development Muslim community resources. The Waqf Board and the *waqf* Council of India, in this sense, are directly responsible for the proper and

effective management of the *waqf* properties in India.¹¹ There are a series of legislatures in colonial and postcolonial India that empower the state to manage *waqf* institutions. Even the Constitution of India provides powers to the state in this regard. The Central Waqf Council, which was established in 1955, advises the central government on matters relating to the functioning of *waqf* boards and proper administration of *waqf* in the country. All the Waqf Boards in the country are linked to the Waqf Council. These boards pay one percent of their annual income as the *waqf* fund to the Council. The Council prepares audited accounts of its income and expenditure.

Various *waqf* laws authorize the Waqf Boards to undertake four types of activities:

- (a) The survey and identification of all the valid *waqf* properties
- (b) The publication of lists of all valid *waqf*
- (c) The registration of new *waqf*
- (d) The superintendence of *waqf*

The *waqf* boards generate money from the rent of *waqf* properties. They receive bank loans and state grants. The boards undertake three main developmental activities:

- (a) The promotion of education and assistance religious and modern Muslim institutions
- (b) Managing mosques, graveyards, and tombs by collecting rent and making payments to Imams and other employees. Ritualistic practices such as organizing *'urs* at Darghas
- (c) Providing medical services in health centers

The *waqf* administration in India has always been criticized, and it is generally argued that the *waqf* should be managed directly by the Muslim community. I also found that the *waqf* boards were quite mismanaged. Bureaucratization has converted these institutions into corrupt offices.

¹¹ The term '*waqf*' in its literal sense means "detention" or "stoppage". According to the *Hanafi* School of Islamic law, *wakf* is the extinction of the proprietor's ownership in the thing dedicated and its detention in the implied ownership of God in such a manner that the profits may revert to and be applied for the benefit of human beings.

ISLAMIC PLURALITY, SOCIAL ACTION, AND THE THIRD SECTOR IN INDIA

In conclusion, it is important to make two important points. The first point is related to the conceptual boundaries of the modern Third Sector. The modern concept of the Third Sector is based on rational humanism. NGOs, interest groups, relief organizations, civil liberty organizations, and social movements are supposed to be the part of the Third Sector. The inherent unity of the Third Sector is derived from the fact that all institutions are working to achieve certain social objectives without making financial profit. These institutions stand outside the state as well as the corporate sectors and, therefore, collectively constitute what is often called the non-profit sector. The Third Sector follows a secular idea of charity where humanism, not the religious reward, is the motivating force. In this sense, only modern Islamic organizations run by modern professional management could be qualified as Third Sector organizations, although it is difficult to accommodate the activities of the local, rural Muslim organizations, such as small *dargahs* and *madrasas*, into its folds. The Islamic social plurality is a result of a historical evolution. It represents a unique cultural synthesis of traditional religious Islamic charity and local Indian religious giving. Islamic social plurality is based on the religious conceptions of charity, where the rewards of social actions are to be given by god in the after life. Islamic social organizations, their modes of functioning, and their alienation from other social groups should be properly understood. For that, the Third Sector must rethink its position on religious organizations and analyze the historical context in which these organizations emerged.

The second point is about the local participation of Muslims in non-Islamic social struggles. In recent years, a variety of people's movements have emerged in India. These movements, such as movements against big dams and forced displacements, along with women's movements, Dalit and *adivasi* movements, and the peasant and workers movements, challenge the social and political power structures from a number of perspectives. Popular discourse does not look at the participation of Muslims in these struggles. On the contrary Muslims are seen merely as the bearer of a fixed Muslim identity. However, local Muslim participation in different non-religious social movements such as the Chhatisgarh Mukti Morcha in the Indian state of Chhatisgarh and the people's movement for education in the Jahanabad area of central Bihar makes this question much more relevant. Thus, active Muslim participation in non-religious social movements should be viewed in a wider perspective. Muslims, like any other social group, respond to non-Muslim issues. Their social activities are not limited to Muslim organizations.

These two points lead us to this paper's main argument. Let us underline two broad reflections of Islamic religious plurality in India:

(a) Muslim organizations in India, representing a variety of stakeholders, work to achieve a variety of social objectives related to different Indian-Muslim communities. The considerable heterogeneity in the ideological stands and social activities of Muslim organizations produces multiple interpretations of Muslim homogeneity. We may call this "functional Islamic religious plurality." It endorses Richard Eaton's argument of a "double movement of identity": A localization of Islamic principles and a simultaneous reproduction of Muslim homogeneity.

(b) The social and political assertions of Muslims do not necessarily operate within the ideological boundaries of Muslim organizations. Without giving up their particular Islamic identity, Muslims participate in different social movements as workers, peasants, and displaced people. This aspect demonstrates an important dimension of Islamic religious plurality.

This paper has made an attempt to understand Islamic religious plurality in India from the perspectives of Muslim organizations. I hope that further research on this topic will help explore other dimensions of social actions of Muslim communities in India.

APPENDIX:
CONTOURS OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS PLURALITY IN INDIA

Type of organization	Activities	Target group	Funding	Islamic content
Indigenous-local Islamic organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ritualistic activities related to religion *Imparting religious education and running local level <i>madarsas</i> or primary schools *Responding to social/cultural issues of concerned Muslim community 	*Local Muslim community	*Local level indigenous religious giving	*Indigenous form of Islam
Islamic religious social organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Providing higher Islamic education, conducting research on Islamic issues *Managing the religious and/ or ritualistic activities *Managing the health services for local population *Publication of religious literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *General devotees *Lower middle/middle class rural/semi-urban Muslim population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Local organized religious collection *Chharawa Donation box *Door to door funding *Publication of Islamic literature *Foreign funding 	*Committed to different Islamic sects
Liberal modernist social organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Providing modern higher education, research on Muslim issues *Providing medical services, research in traditional medicine *Establishing financial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Middle class Urban Indian Muslims *Urban Middle class non-Muslims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *<i>Zakāt</i> money *Money from Muslim trusts *<i>Waqf</i> properties 	*Secular, Liberal Islam

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Color, Beauty, and Marriage: The Ivory Skin Model

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Hierarchical skin tone beliefs and value systems in various cultures have been repeatedly documented in both lay and scientific literature. In the U.S., individuals of lighter skin tone are preferred as friends and marital partners, are more likely to be employed in higher status occupations, and are socially more upwardly mobile compared to individuals of darker skin tone (Porter 1991). The literature about Brazil is similar. Brazilians accept and promote miscegenation in the hopes of eventually “whitening” or “bleaching” the country’s entire population (Twine 1997). Hierarchical skin tone beliefs are also documented among South Asians. The wide popularity of hair and complexion lighteners among South Asians living in and outside of South Asia, predominantly among women, attests to the high value placed on light skin tone (Sahay and Piran 1997).¹

In this paper I examine the role of skin color among first-generation immigrant Hindu-Indian women in New Jersey.² I expect that skin color plays a significant role in the lives of Hindu-Indian women. I argue that for many Hindu-Indian women, feelings related to beauty, attractiveness, and marriage marketability are strongly influenced by the lightness of their skin. The purpose of this paper is to present skin color as an indicator of status for Hindu-Indian women in the context of beauty, and to discuss the implications of that status indicator in the marriage market. My analysis suggests that beauty and attractiveness are influenced by skin color, and that there is a link between beauty and attractiveness, as well as between skin color and marriage marketability.

¹ Das Dasgupta and Warrier (1997) include the countries of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Nepal as constituting the geographical area “South Asia.” Other theorists like Ludden (2002) also include Sri Lanka and Bhutan.

² I chose New Jersey because it has one of the fastest growing South Asian populations. According to the 1990 census, nearly 80,000 Asian Indians live in New Jersey. Six counties, namely Middlesex, Hudson, Somerset, Morris, Bergen, and Passaic, have more than one percent South Asian residents.

I concentrate on studies of Hindu-Indian communities, notably the literature regarding the role skin color plays in the lives of Hindu-Indian women. My goal is to draw upon these works to develop a framework for understanding skin color and its impact on Hindu-Indian women in the marriage market. I review discourses on the status systems of caste, gender, and beauty. In addition to reviewing the scientific literature, I explore television, internet sites, and magazine advertisements. I also investigate movies, internet cosmetic sites, and newspaper matrimonial advertisements. Finally, I discuss the anonymous survey questionnaire that I administered to fourteen first-generation immigrant Hindu-Indian women in New Jersey, as well as the informal unstructured interviews that I conducted with five women. I aim to empirically assess the link between skin color, feelings of attractiveness, and marriage marketability within the Hindu-Indian context.

THE COLOR GAME: THE STATUS SYSTEMS OF CASTE AND GENDER

In this section I create a framework in which to contextualize and understand the role skin color plays in Hindu-Indian women's lives. I accomplish this by first reviewing caste in the Indian framework in order to demonstrate how social status and social closure work in the Hindu-Indian context. Although caste is socially constructed, it is an example of a status system and a form of social closure (Aneesh and Borocz 2000).³ It sets up a context for people to posit and support the maintenance of status-based beliefs.⁴ Next, I move on to

³ The literature points to two major conceptualizations of status (Borocz 1997). In the Weberian model, status is relational and intersubjective, while the Lintonian model portrays status as highly positional and structured. In this study, I use both notions of status in order to demonstrate that the caste system, while rigid in its boundaries, has porous borders.

⁴ Belief in a status is a belief that people in one social category are more esteemed than people in another social category. Status is the "evaluative relationship between social categories or groups," and can be "perceptions of what 'most others' believe or what actors themselves believe" (Ridgeway 2000). Status construction theory indicates that "people on opposite sides of a recognized social difference boundary regularly interact in regard to shared goals, the terms on which they interact and influence hierarchies that emerge can induce the participant to form shared status beliefs about their difference" (Ridgeway 2000). People carry these beliefs to other social encounters, agreeing that people from one category are more esteemed and competent than people from another category. In turn, status beliefs become taken for granted and reified, especially by dominant or hegemonic groups. Status construction theory also posits that "interactional contexts where people from different social categories come together may...be a potent source of status beliefs" (Ridgeway 2000). The perceived salient differences among people are enough to cause people to favor their own group over other groups (Messick and Mackie 1989).

articulate gender as a status. Finally, I present beauty as a form of status in the Indian cultural context. The literature reviewed indicates that the exact components that comprise a person's status in contemporary India are nebulous. What is clear, however, is that class is determined by caste, socioeconomic status, and family background. Furthermore, class and color may be correlated because they share caste as a common foundation.

In the Hindu-Indian context the caste system is a salient status system, organizing Indian society. It is thoroughly legitimated by and intertwined with Hindu religious doctrine and practice (Beteille 1968; Beteille 1990; Sen 2001).⁵ The caste system consists of four main social classes: *Brahmins* (highest caste—the priests and intellectuals), *Kshatriyas* (upper middle-caste—the defenders and warriors), *Vaishyas* (middle-caste—merchants and business people), and *Shudras*, which include the Untouchables or scheduled caste (lowest caste—in charge of waste management and similar jobs) (Beteille 1968; 1990).

Dutta Gupta (1973) and Sen (2001) argue that there is a strong link between color and caste. Past documentation show that *Brahmins* are generally much lighter in skin tone than *Shudras* (Beteille 1968; Dutta Gupta 1973; Beteille 1990; Sen 2001). In classical Hindu-Aryan texts of prayers, such as the *Rigveda*, there is a hierarchy of colors and caste groups: *Brahmins*, at the top, are associated with white, *Shudras*, at the bottom, with black, and the *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* in the middle with red, bronze, and yellow. Coupled with other Aryan scriptures, classical texts indicate that Aryans may have been preoccupied with color due to an acute consciousness of their own physical aberration from the darker-haired and darker-eyed people they invaded and colonized in the Indian sub-continent. Numerous theories conjecture that Aryans may have developed the caste system, and skin color or *varna* was the basis of this system (Dutta Gupta 1973). In other words, caste might have been derived from skin color. However, Das (1977), reviewing the same classical scriptures and ancient Vedic texts, finds a metaphorical description of the origins of the four castes: from the sacrifice of *purusha*, the source of all creation, the four castes arise—*Brahmin* is the mouth, *Kshatriya* the arms, *Vaishya* the thighs, and *Shudra* the feet (see Aneesh and Borocz 2000). Clearly, these theories are speculative. The origins of the caste system, the hierarchy between the four groups, and the relationship between the caste system and skin tones are debatable.

⁵ Alternatively, Dirks (2001) argues from an Orientalist framework that caste was used to organize India's diverse social groups for the benefit of British control. While Dirks embraces powerful evidence, my study shows that caste, regardless of the context of its production and reproduction, is a critical factor in marriage marketability.

Despite the contestation over the exact origin of the caste system, experts on the history of the development and appropriation of the caste system agree that, like race in the United States (Davis 1991), the caste system is tied to the notion of untouchability and symbolic pollution (involving purification rites that cleanse one from pollution derived from contact with people of the lowest caste). The practice of untouchability in India was established as early as several centuries BCE and became fully established in the Gupta period between 320–647 CE (Aneesh and Borocz 2000). Untouchables lived in separate villages; eating or drinking with Untouchables and any type of bodily contact with them was considered polluting, necessitating some form of religious purification (Betielle 1968; Dutta Gupta 1973; Betielle 1990; Sen 2001).

Although detailed instructions for purification are provided in various *smritis*, a category of Hindu scriptures, Gandhi fought to make purification practices illegal. Still, it was not until the late 1930s and early 1940s that Untouchables were allowed to enter Hindu temples (Aneesh and Borocz 2000). Rituals surrounding purification implies, among other things, that those born into a higher caste will not be considered pure eternally, for they can pollute themselves. *Brahmin* men were presumed to be less *Brahmin* if they had sexual intercourse with *Shudra* women (Aneesh and Borocz 2000). Likewise, if a *Shudra* married into an upper-caste family, community members excommunicated the family the *Shudra* had married into (Sen 2001). In one of the unstructured interviews I conducted for this study, a respondent explained that when her cousin married a man of lower caste, the cousin's mother said, "With this marriage, I lose my caste designation."⁶ She implies that marrying beneath one's caste dilutes the purity of the higher caste family.

Caste greatly affects occupational mobility for Hindu-Indians, especially for men. Traditionally, men in the *Shudra* caste could hope to choose from some of the following career choices: herbalist, sweeper, washer/laundry man, blacksmith, and liquor brewer; on the other hand, men from the *Vaishya* caste are traditionally merchants and small business owners (Dutta Gupta 1973; Sen 2001). But, Sen stresses that the relationships among caste, color, socio-economic status, and class have changed dramatically over the last twenty-five years (Sen 2001). For instance, the recent rise in unemployment among the skilled labor force in India's urban centers along with anti-caste discrimination and affirmative action legislation has brought about radical changes in the system of holding traditional occupations in various castes (Sen 2001). Moreover, many caste strictures, especially those

⁶ I translate here from the original Bengali, "Ey beeyer shate amar jato chole galo."

surrounding purification of polluting forces, are not relevant to the daily lives of higher caste Indians. In spouse selection, caste matters less than education, income, and foreign residency. Nevertheless, the links between hard work and upward mobility is still largely a myth. Caste boundaries have not weakened even though government policies require colleges and universities to hold a certain number of seats for *Shudras*. *Shudras* continue to be marginalized and they are excluded from new dynamics in caste, color, class, and socio-economic status.

Undoubtedly, caste continues to be an important status marker, but its salience is not uniform across India. Despite the presence of anti-caste discrimination laws, South Indians continue to see caste as an important status marker because they retain many of their traditional beliefs in caste strictures; thus South Indian *Brahmins* consider themselves to be more pure than North Indian *Brahmins* (Sen 2001). On the other hand, North Indians, especially those from urban Bombay and New Delhi, rely less on caste in the context of marriage because class has been redefined in North India. There class is less entwined with caste and depends primarily on socio-economic status (Sen 2001). In marriage a poor *Brahmin* family is no longer more desirable than a wealthy *Vaishya* or *Kshatriya* family. This is particularly true in Calcutta where the communist government is trying to eradicate caste from the social system permanently (Sen 2001).

Despite the changes in values and ethos attributed to each of the castes, skin color and class continue to be strongly tied to the caste system as a whole—the higher the caste one belongs to, the more social prestige one has. For example, in a movie about second-generation Indian-Americans, *ABCD*, caste signifies occupational mobility (2001).⁷ In one scene, a dark-skinned Indian immigrant man working as a New York City street vendor asks the fair-skinned American-born and college-educated female protagonist which caste she is from. She replies, “I am definitely of higher caste than you are!” In another scene, a prospective groom’s mother asks to verify if the woman is as fair as she appears in her picture. Thus, lighter skin is equated with beauty and is valued over darker skin for women.

Liddle and Joshi (1987) argue that gender is another important variable in determining class in India, yet it is often ignored in literature discussing forms of status and power. British colonization affected Indian women in various ways (Liddle and Joshi 1987). In the colonial context, white British men are associated with the mind, while women—both white British and non-

⁷ ABCD, “American-Born Confused Desi,” is an acronym used among the South Asian-American community to refer to the American-born generation (*desi* is someone of Indian descent).

white Indians—are associated with the body, procreation, and carnal pleasures. British women, the white and “pristine” women, represent the ideal female type, the mother; Indian women, the dark and colonized women, represent the stereotypical “bad” woman,⁸ the feminized racial whore.⁹

The retention of the caste system further sexualizes and racializes the bodies of contemporary Indian women in two major ways. First, traditional caste strictures dictate a patriarchal family structure and prevent women’s social, physical, and geographical mobility outside the home: “a woman’s father has authority over her in her childhood, her husband in her youth, and her son in her old age” (Liddle and Joshi 1987). Confining women to the home as exclusive sexual property and preventing them from contributing to the economic income of the family and gaining economic independence enforces the control of men over the sexual and economic autonomy of women. Still, women from a small select group of wealthy upper-caste families earn higher education degrees and secure professional, white-collar employment (Liddle and Joshi 1987). This pattern suggests a formidable array of privileged circumstances which allow high-caste women access to professional positions. Wealthy upper-caste women are able to liberate themselves from many constraints that bind middle and low-caste women. Yet the freedom that upper-caste women gain is limited by male domination even at the top of the occupational hierarchy. Men continue to work primarily in the public sphere, while women’s work often remains restricted to the private, domestic sphere. The restriction of Hindu-Indian women to the home and their limited interaction with their husbands disadvantage women and leave them no choice but to “bargain with patriarchy” (Derne 1994). Indeed, male dominance in India is rooted in the gender division of labor.

⁸ The Aryan invasion, compounded by British colonization, may partially explain the present preference for lighter skin among Indians. The British sought to fashion a Western-style state structure in colonial India (Kaviraj 1997), which, by definition, meant white rule and white supremacy. They openly sanctified new forms of structural rigidity and ruthless social Darwinism and encouraged the colonizers, as well as lighter-skinned Indians, to impute to themselves, by virtue of birth, feelings of natural omnipotence and permanence (Nandy 1982). The British produced a cultural consensus in India in which the dominance of white and light-skinned people over dark-skinned people was symbolized by political and socio-economic status. Nandy (1982) writes, “The economic exploitation, psychological up-rootedness and cultural disruption it caused was tremendous.” The impact of British colonialism in India remains deep.

⁹ The “prostitute” is a more complex notion in Indian history. I present a simplified version of the “whore” in order to articulate a dichotomy known as the body/mind dualism (Saukko 1998). Here, the “mind” is associated with the spirit, intellectuality, and values traditionally deemed positive. The “body” is associated with the flesh, instinct, and values traditionally disparaged.

A second way the caste system sexualizes and racializes women is by denying them the enjoyment of their own bodies. Women are trained to think that sexual pleasures only pertain to men (Saukko 1998). Hindu-Indian women are expected to be sexual and connected to the body on the one hand, and non-sexual and denied the body on the other. In private they must serve the husband's every sexual desire and fantasy; in public they must act as if they have no sexuality at all. Women must privately signal desire yet publicly deny it. Women are therefore caught in a double bind whereby culture demands them to be beautiful and seductive bodies at home, but condemns them for being beautiful and sexy in public (Saukko 1998). Low-caste, dark-skinned women's bodies are more sexualized than upper-caste, fair-skinned women's bodies (Freeman 1979).

Skin color also defines status in the context of beauty. A person's beauty or ugliness is one of their most accessible features and provides status information in most encounters (Webster and Driskell 1986). When a person's beauty or ugliness activates patterns of widely shared cultural beliefs, it becomes a status characteristic, like race or gender. People often treat leading status indicators as clues to a person's ability to perform tasks (Webster and Driskell 1986). For example, teachers have higher performance expectations for attractive students (Clifford and Walster 1973), attractive counsellors are considered more proficient (Cash and Kehr 1978), and attractive adults are thought to have more successful marriages (Dion 1972). Studies also indicate that beautiful people have additional advantages over ugly people, the effects of which appear among diverse populations and in a wide of range of situations (Webster and Driskell 1986). That is, beauty and ugliness affects cognition about individuals and their interaction patterns (Clifford and Walster 1973). Here, women have had to concern themselves with appearance more than men. The affects of skin color in beauty appear to be stronger for females than males, regardless of racial and cultural background (Gibson 1931; Drake and Cayton 1945; Neal and Wilson 1989; Keith and Herring, 1991; Sahay and Piran 1997). The model for female beauty is often the white Western woman. Among non-white women, light-skinned women are generally considered more beautiful (Chapkis 1986; Sahay and Piran 1997). An exploration of these ideas is the focus of the following section.

BEAUTY AS A STATUS: "MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO'S THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL?"

Skin color is a significant agent in Indian women's lives. South Asian magazine advertisements for cosmetics and bleaching creams indicate that

South Asian women believe and internalize the “ivory skin model.” Indian women are presented with a wide range of skin whitening products, such as Fair and Lovely Cream and Vicco Ayurvedic Cream, and they spend a significant amount of money on such skin bleaches to alter their skin tone (Sahay and Piran 1997). In an Indian television commercial advertising Fair and Lovely (1989), a mother proudly announces to her daughter that a prospective groom’s family has selected her picture for a “face showing” ceremony.¹⁰ The daughter is at first enthusiastic, but then sadly realizes that she is not as fair as her pictures indicate. She is in utter turmoil but soon discovers Fair and Lovely Cream. The daughter uses the cream for a month and is glowingly white on the day of the ceremony. The groom’s family is gleaming with happiness when they see the prospective bride’s face, and her future mother-in-law proudly comments on how fair her new daughter-in-law is. Likewise, Shahnaz Herbal (an exclusive cosmetic and skin care line found in most South Asian countries) manufactures “whitening complex-ayurvedic skin clear formula,” one of their most popular products, for “pigmented skin, scars and blemishes” (see www.tofah.com).

The most conspicuous efforts in adopting the myth of white beauty in India can be observed in Bollywood, the Indian movie industry located in Bombay and named after Hollywood. The Indian film industry produces more films per year than any other country in the world; Indian movies are regularly distributed to over fifty countries. Consider the movie *Naseeb apna apna* (1986) as an example of the high esteem for fair skin among Indians. In this film a Hindu-Indian man returns to his village from Bombay in order to participate in an arranged marriage after his parents received a huge dowry offering. On his wedding night he anxiously lifts the red and gold veil from his bride’s face only to be met with a bride whose complexion is like dark bittersweet chocolate. He immediately realizes why such a huge dowry was offered. Disappointed, he leaves the consummation room and his parents’ home, intending never to return. At that moment, the new bride, aware of her dark complexion and hence her own ugliness, vows to win him over. She learns how to lighten her skin by bleaching, apply make-up, and straighten her curly hair. At the end of the movie, the bittersweet chocolate-colored woman is able to lighten her skin to a milky white tone and win her husband back. Current blockbuster movies, like *Zubedia* (2000), *Dil chatha hai* (2001), *Kal*

¹⁰ During the face showing ceremony the groom and his family see the prospective bride for the first time. If the groom’s family (and to some extent the groom) finds the prospective bride acceptable, the groom’s family formally proposes on behalf of the groom.

ho na ho (2003), and *Veer-zaara* (2004) also display extremely light-skinned women as lead female actors.

Randomly reviewing three editions of the English language Indian magazine *Femina*¹¹ further indicates that Indians prefer lighter skin tones and Caucasoid features.¹² In 1996, the Indian female cover model who won the “*Femina* Look of the Year 1996” has creamy white skin and blue eyes. Other issues (May 1998 and May 1999) produced countless female images with similar features, such as the *Femina* “Miss Beautiful Skin” contest winner whose skin color more closely resembles that of white European women than that of the average South Asian woman. Undoubtedly, there is an abundance of physical variation among Indian women (as well as European women), but the images in *Femina* magazine are much more representative of white European women than of South Asian women. The message conveyed is that only fair or white skin is beautiful, and Indian women are precariously aspiring to become fairer and fairer.

Along with the strong presence of the modeling industry, the beauty pageant industry has also flourished in India. In order to compete with Hollywood, Paris runways, and Donald Trump’s beauty pageants, wealthy urban Indian women have realized that they must adhere to the globally dominant paradigm of beauty—whiteness. Miss Universe 1994, Sushmita Sen, an Indian, is over 5’11”, quite fair-skinned, and could easily pass for an Italian. She clearly does not represent the average Indian woman. Aishwarya Rai, Miss World 1994, is also a light-skinned Indian with naturally blue-green eyes. About one third of the entrants of international contests such as Miss Universe have dark skin (Clifford and Walster 1973), yet it was not until 2001 that a dark-skinned woman from the African subcontinent won the title.

Finally, a random sample of fifteen matrimonial advertisements—marriages among educated Indians are sometimes arranged through advertisements in newspapers—in March 2001 from three weekly editions of an Indian-American newspaper, *India Abroad*, reveals that Indians in India view family background, region of origin, and skin color (along with virginity) as the most important factors in the selection of a bride.¹³ The

¹¹ *Femina* is a popular monthly fashion magazine circulated in India, as well as among South Asians living abroad.

¹² I reviewed less than ten percent of the monthly magazine because this study is exploratory in nature, and the central source of empirical evidence lies in the qualitative survey questionnaire.

¹³ The target audience of this newspaper is South Asian-Americans. However, when I compared the matrimonial advertisements in *India Abroad* with matrimonial advertisements placed in newspapers circulated in India, the content was similar. Nonetheless, research indicates that skin

following are examples of two advertisements placed in one of these editions:¹⁴

Excerpt 1: “North Indian Physician parents invite correspondence for daughter 28/4’10”, slim, fair to wheatish complexion...”

Excerpt 2: “Alliance invited...from...N[orth] Indian, petite, attractive girls...” (Generally, North Indian women are much lighter in skin tone than South Indian women.)

My review of scholarly literature, along with various forms of advertisements, movies, and matrimonial advertisements, points to three major trends. First, caste is a system of social closure. Second, Hindu-Indian women’s bodies are sexualized and racialized, thus marking them for procreation; they are vehicles for cultural production and consumption. Third, skin color plays a significant role in the lives of Hindu-Indian women who actively pursue the “ivory skin model.” The message relayed is that light-skinned women are more attractive (especially to men) than dark-skinned women. These three trends are useful in designing an empirical study and writing about the role skin color plays in the lives of Hindu-Indian women.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN: GIVING VOICE TO COLOR

The objectives of this study are four-fold. The first objective is to develop a framework to understand the impact of skin color on Hindu-Indian women. To do this, I drew upon the rich scholarly literature on the politics of skin color among Hindu-Indian women. I gathered information on the effects of skin color on Hindu-Indian women, reviewing movies, television, the Internet, magazine advertisements, Internet cosmetic sites, and newspaper matrimonial advertisements. These items were selected during library searches, “surfing” the World Wide Web, and visits to South Asian supermarkets and video rental stores in Edison, NJ.

The second goal is to measure the attitudes and beliefs that immigrant Hindu-Indian women in the U.S. have about their beauty and attractiveness, especially with regards to skin color. My third aim is to empirically assess the

color is less important for Indian-Americans than for Indians living in India (Siddiqui and Reeves 1989).

¹⁴ I present the two excerpts only to foreshadow to the results and analysis of the data set.

marriage partners of immigrant Hindu-Indian women in the U.S. with respect to caste, socioeconomic status, and skin color. Finally, the fourth goal is to understand the roles of, as well as relationships between, caste, color, and socioeconomic status in marriage.

To fulfill the last three objectives, I used unstructured informal interviews and a 29-page, 71-item, anonymous, self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix). A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included with each questionnaire sent to thirty Hindu-Indian women. All these women are American immigrants now living in NJ; fourteen women responded (47% response rate). A detachable informed cover sheet provided information about the researcher, the purpose of the study, the names and phone numbers of faculty supervisors, and a statement assuring the respondents anonymity. A copy of the Human Subjects Protocol approval was also attached. Of the fourteen respondents, three were interviewed. I also interviewed two of the women who chose not to answer the survey questionnaire.

The questionnaire covers four major areas. The first section asks respondents about their demographic characteristics.¹⁵ The second segment assesses attitudinal aspects of respondent's appearance (beauty and attractiveness) with respect to skin color.¹⁶ The third component asks about the participants' present or former spouses.¹⁷ Finally, the fourth section consists of closed and open-ended components that examine the role of caste, color, and socioeconomic status. It also examines the effects of the intersecting relationships among caste, color, and socioeconomic status on Hindu-Indian women in marriage. At the end of the questionnaire I ask respondents to comment on the survey. The questions are structured to appear non-judgmental. The variables in the study include demographic variables such as a woman's age, caste, education level, income, marital status, and place of birth, as well as information on her spouses' age, education, occupation, and caste. Other variables include perceptions of beauty and attractiveness, and the perceived role of skin color in marriage.

The survey and interview participants include U.S. immigrant, heterosexual, Hindu-Indian women living in New Jersey, whose parents and husbands are both of Hindu-Indian origin. The respondents lived in India from at least ages 4 to 18, immigrated to the U.S after marriage between 1970

¹⁵ The questions are adapted from the "Demographics" portion of the General Social Survey (GSS) (1998).

¹⁶ Some of the questions are adapted from Cash's Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSQR) (2000) and the Skin Color Questionnaire (SCQ) (1992).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

and 1989, and are married or were previously married. They all read, write, and speak English fluently. Data collection methods include both snowball and convenience sampling. For both the questionnaire and the interviews, I contacted women through personal networks in New Jersey and I asked for help in identifying and approaching prospective interview participants. Such non-random sampling methods usually ensure the diversity of a sample, but generally preclude any estimates of generalization to the population at large.

The goal of my research is to show that skin color affects many spheres of Hindu-Indian women's lives, especially marriage marketability, and to confirm that skin color is a significant status marker. I wish to give voice to my respondents and to advance theory; therefore, I take a qualitative approach in the analysis of the data. My analysis includes analytic induction (Ragin 1994) and microanalysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Analytic induction enables a close study of the eight open-ended responses and the five interviews, which generates empirical categories (grouping similar instances of social phenomenon) and explanatory concepts (the components of the analytical frame). Concepts define the categories, and the members of a category illustrate the concepts. Microanalysis involves careful and minute examination and interpretation of data. It is comprised of two components: participants' recounting of events and the observers' interpretation of those events.

THE POLITICS OF COLOR: DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

In order to empirically establish skin color as a status indicator in beauty and marriage marketability, I tested two hypotheses through the qualitative survey questionnaire: first, a larger proportion of lighter skinned women than darker skinned women feel beautiful and attractive; second, a larger proportion of lighter skinned women than darker skinned women marry men who are economically upwardly mobile. I first present an in-depth sample description of the forced-choice response questions, and sum up the results with an inductive analysis in tabular format. I then present a microanalysis of the women's responses in the interviews and the open-ended questions.

The women who participated in this study were between the ages of 40 and 60, and had lived in the U.S. for more than twenty to twenty-five years. They were highly educated, upper middle-class, and in upwardly mobile white-collar jobs. Eleven respondents (78.6%) identified their caste. Of these, seven indicated they were of *Brahmin* caste (58.3%). None were *Shudras*. *Brahmins* may have the most opportunity to immigrate to the U.S., while a *Shudra* may lack the appropriate resources and capabilities to immigrate to America or other "Western" countries.

None of respondents adhere to caste strictures, but all are “fairly religious.” This may indicate that they do not equate practicing the Hindu religion with adhering to caste strictures. None of the respondents have divorced or remarried after the death of a husband. Still, cultural practices and religious beliefs do not likely foster divorce and remarriage.

All fourteen respondents were married in India and had immigrated to the U.S. after marriage on dependent visas. Nine respondents (64.3%) had arranged marriages and there are almost no inter-caste marriages (1.4% or two respondents had inter-caste marriages). I found that most *Brahmin* women had married *Brahmin* men, *Kshatriya* women had married *Kshatriya* men, and *Vaishya* women had married *Vaishya* men. Other characteristics of these couples matched as well. Like their wives, the husbands are fair-skinned, highly educated (approximately 80% of the respondents’ husbands have master degrees, doctoral degrees, or professional degrees), affluent (about 60% have annual household incomes over \$100,000), and between the ages of forty-six and sixty.

All fourteen respondents answered all questions pertaining to skin color and beauty. Twelve respondents (85.7%) identified themselves as “light-skinned,” and all respondents, except for one woman who identified herself as light-skinned, reported that they are satisfied with their skin tone and facial appearance. They do not want to change their skin tone, and consider themselves to be attractive; moreover, they believe that others find them attractive. To further substantiate that most of the women identify themselves as light-skinned and feel they are beautiful, I created a skin color scale and a beauty scale by calculating an overall mean for all relevant questions regarding skin color and beauty. All responses within the skin color scale range from .75 to 1.75 (0=extremely light, 1=somewhat light, 2=somewhat dark, 3=extremely dark), and about 85.7% report 1.25 or over on the beauty scale (sample question: “I am physically attractive” and sample response: 0=definitely disagree, 1=mostly disagree, 2=mostly agree, 3=definitely agree). Below, the inductive analysis of the sample description shows that women in the sample consider themselves to be light-skinned, upper-caste, beautiful, and are married to upwardly mobile men:¹⁸

¹⁸ I chose a fictive name for each respondent for the sake of anonymity.

	Empirical Categories		Explanatory Concepts	
	1	2	1	2
	Feels attractive?	Married upwardly mobile man?	Light-skinned?	Higher Caste?
Case				
Minali	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kajal	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sita	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Divya	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poonam	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kiran	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shaila	Yes	Yes	Yes	Don't know
Sonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Juhi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Don't know
Padma	Yes	Yes	No	Missing
Manisha	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rekha	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Radha	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Urmila	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

The final component of the questionnaire, which assessed these women's ideas about caste, color, and socioeconomic status, provides the content for the microanalysis. Before examining the answers to the eight open-ended questions, I will briefly describe the data from the forced-choice response questions.

In non-arranged marriages (commonly known as "love marriage"), education, personality, looks, and socio-economic status (in order of relevance) are the most significant characteristics in selecting a spouse. Caste and color play some role. In arranged marriages, caste, socio-economic status, and color are central, but the exact order of importance for these variables is ambiguous. Within both types of marriage, caste, color, and socio-economic status, among other variables, play a role in mate selection. The saliency and hierarchy among the variables, however, are less than lucid. Microscopic examination of the remaining data adds some clarity.

First, for Hindu-Indian women, like many Black American women (see Gibson 1931; Drake and Cayton 1945; Myers and Yochelson 1948; Udry, Bauman, and Chase 1971; Chapkis 1986; Neal and Wilson 1989; Keith and Herring 1991; Bond and Cash 1992), skin color is an important factor in

marriage.¹⁹ Radha, who is a “somewhat light” *Brahman* married to a *Brahman* man with skin the color of “light brown sugar,” says, in her interview, “Indian folk literature, folk songs, and traditional wedding songs place a high value on fair skin color. The ideal bride almost always has a light complexion.” She states on her questionnaire, “Skin color does play an important role.” Kiran, another “somewhat light” *Brahmin* woman married to a *Brahmin* man with skin the color of “light brown sugar,” says in her interview, “A darker girl is often a liability to her family. It is difficult to arrange a marriage for her. Even a dark *Brahmin* girl has a low value on the marriage market. Many brides’ families are forced to provide a dowry for features that do not match to the ideal bride.”²⁰ Moreover, in the questionnaire, Divya writes, “Fair skin gives better appearances. That plays a significant role not only to the families concerned but also to the community at large. It presents a sense of pride.”

Second, skin color has much greater weight in choosing a bride than a groom. In her questionnaire Kiran states, “[It is] important for a bride to be fair-skinned. [It is] difficult to marry off a daughter with dark skin. No one considers the color of the groom. [They] just look at his background. . . . Sometimes love marriage [is] the only way to trap a man to marry a dark woman. For boys, skin color does not matter.” Rekha comments in the survey, “[Skin color] does play a major role in choosing a bride for a son.” Minali, another survey respondent, mentions, “[In the selection of a groom], physical attributes play a very minor role. Again, that’s how the history and culture of the society has been as far as men are concerned.” And Manisha writes in the survey, “[The] groom should be able to support the daughter financially. In our system nobody really cares about how dark the male is as long as the bride is light-skinned.” Scholars support these comments. According to Sen (2001), a dark-skinned son is not as much of a liability to a family as a dark-skinned daughter, because in a patrilocal society like India, men can more easily acquire other socially desirable qualities, such as education and lucrative careers. Liddle and Joshi (1987) stress that the low

¹⁹ Women may have little or no agency in choosing a mate or in deciding when to get married (or not get married). The groom’s family almost always extends the marriage proposal. If a woman does not receive any marriage proposals, the woman’s family may invite families, even from lower castes, to extend marriage proposals.

²⁰ Dowry giving is illegal in India but many families continue to or are forced to give dowries to their daughters’ in-laws, masking it as “wedding gifts.”

²⁰ Sahay and Piran (1997) suggest a preference for honey brown skin tone (i.e. light skin that has the appearance being tanned) rather than lighter or darker skin tones. While this may be true, skin color preference is never black.

status of women in India and the norm of female domestication allow for the disregard for women's other achievements, such as education.

Third, microanalysis of the open-ended questions and interview materials reveals that light skin color is equated with beauty among Indians. For Juhi, a survey respondent, "Lighter skin color is thought of as beautiful." Madhuri writes, "I think Indians prefer light/fair-skinned partners." Non-structured interviews with Sharmila and Nargis, who are not among the fourteen survey respondents, also support the notion that Indians equate light or white skin with beauty, especially for women. For Sharmila, who considers herself dark as "bittersweet chocolate," skin color and facial features proved to be a heated topic of discussion. Sharmila felt resentment towards her family members because color consciousness was not something she had developed herself, but rather learned from her mother and maternal grandmother. She was constantly made aware of her dark skin color and its marital ramifications. As a child she did not understand why marriage was such a priority. She also could not comprehend why her skin color should indicate her ability or lack of ability to be a good wife or dictate whom she could or could not marry. She says, "Throughout my high school and college life, I was taught to feel that I was not pretty enough to attract men from a [comparable] caste." Similarly, Nargis, whose skin tone resembles "milk chocolate," reveals that she and her husband, who are of the same caste (and education and socioeconomic level), were forced to elope because his family would not allow him to marry her. She comments, "My mother-in-law said I looked like a chaadaal" (loosely the term chaadaal, carrying a negative connotation, refers to miscegenation). The son rarely communicates with his parents now, and on the rare occasions he calls his home country, his family does not acknowledge his marriage and pretends that his wife does not exist. The couple does not celebrate their marriage anniversary, a manifestation of the psychological trauma experienced by the Nargis.

In addition to whiteness or lightness being equated with beauty, the comments of Sharmila and Nargis support the idea that a woman's self-concept develops in part from observing and internalizing what others think about her. Okazawa-Rey (1986) writes, "[the] . . . attributes society assigns to the 'attractive' and 'unattractive' . . . have profound implications for [a woman's] psychosocial development." In this light, a woman may begin to understand her "ugliness" as a moral or psychological attribute, especially if she is repeatedly told that she is ugly and must be well-versed in domestic activities to attract a suitor.

In expressing their opinions about the role of caste in marriage, three out of the fourteen women feel that caste is crucial in choosing a bride. Radha writes, "The caste system in India takes the place of classes of social order in

other societies. It assumes that once the young girls are married they will be surrounded by the same kind of people with the same lifestyle." Survey participants Kajal (a *Kshatriya*) and Manisha (a *Brahmin*) say, respectively, "In most of the cases, caste is the primary factor. Nowadays, it has been changing but the majority still go with the caste" and "Caste plays a major role because customs and traditions are the same on both sides. Because of this it will be easier for the bride and groom to adapt to each other's life style." It is also necessary to compare Hindu-Indian women's skin color not across castes but rather within castes. Shakti emphasizes that a *Brahmin* family will most likely prefer a *Brahmin* woman to a non-*Brahmin* woman, regardless of her skin color. She did not comment on the preferences of *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya* families, but emphasized that "upper-caste members [most likely] will not approve of a marriage with a *Shudra* family no matter how light-skinned the woman." Similarly, Borocz (2000), in his study about social closure and the caste system, iterates that non-*Brahmins* (men) enjoyed more freedom in their relationships with *Shudras* (women).

In addition to the importance of caste, ten women feel that family background, education, and socio-economic status are significant, particularly for the groom. In support of family background, Kiran says, "Education is not the same as money. Culture is the most important thing, which is learned from family background. Education can be learned from school, but they can still be uncultured. Socio-economic status is wealth [in U.S.], but [it is] culture in India." Manisha writes about education, "If a groom is well educated then he will probably have a good future, and will be able to take good care of his family." Divya, Poonam, and Rekha (questionnaire participants) comment on socio-economic status. Divya says, "Social standing and wealth plays an important role. These give a sense of security as well as feeling respectable among friends and families. It plays an important role towards feeling of community at large." Rekha writes, "It plays an important role. Good socio-economic status is looked upon as a status symbol and an accomplishment. So getting one's son or daughter married to a family like that would be considered a great achievement." Additionally, Poonam believes, "In Hindu communities, [the] bride lives with groom's family. Bride's family looks for her welfare by making sure 1) she has financial security, 2) groom has a good education, [and] 3) family members are easy to get along with." Shakti, in a one-to-one interview, attempts to outline the hierarchy among caste, color, socio-economic status, and other variables. She feels a *Brahmin* family looking for an investor in the family business may opt to marry their son to a *Brahmin* woman with the appropriate family background and wealth, rather than to a *Brahmin* woman who is the fairest and prettiest. Regional identity, family background, and education are also

factors to consider. Nonetheless, from the pool of the appropriate *Brahmin* families, the fairest and prettiest woman will most likely be chosen. In turn, a family who does not want to enhance their financial status may choose to marry their son to the fairest and prettiest woman from the appropriate caste membership and family background. Shakti additionally mentions that a woman's personality and compatibility with the prospective groom are somewhat important in situations where the prospective groom has some say in the marriage process.

The discourse that surfaces from the data denotes that a woman's appearance is fundamental in marriage and fair skin is an important factor in her conceptualization of beauty. Moreover, the data supports that the hierarchy among the variables important in marriage is different for men than women: for women skin color is integral, and for men caste and education are the most prominent.

In conclusion, the present study is one of the first to attempt to focus explicitly on the relationships between skin color, feelings of attractiveness, and marriage marketability in the American immigrant Hindu-Indian community. In this paper, I outlined the instances in which skin color is important—modeling, beauty pageants, movie industry, and feelings of beauty—and how these instances factor in the marriage market (for example, access to upwardly-mobile men). I also demonstrated that the majority of women in the sample, who considered themselves to be “light-skinned,” feel attractive and have married upwardly mobile men. As a result, even with a small sample size, the qualitative analysis offers the beginnings of a rich and thick description of the relationships among caste, color, socio-economic status, and class. Certainly, further research, with a much larger sample size, in this area—as well as on other social issues surrounding the South Asian community in the U.S.—is required. Because South Asians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States, and one of the most “under-served” immigrant enclaves in the United States (United States Department of Justice 1999), they serve as an important community in which the politics of color may be studied. My primary agenda with the present investigation is two-fold: 1) to make people aware of the effects of skin color on women's lives, and 2) to address the paucity of research on social problems affecting the South Asian-American community. My hope is to bring social issues, like the way in which skin color affects immigrant and minority groups in the U.S., into hegemonic academic discourse.

APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SKIN COLOR AMONG HINDU-
INDIAN WOMEN

FALL 2001

PART I: Tell Me About Yourself²¹

Instructions

This section asks you questions about your statistical characteristics such as age and income. Answer all the questions as best and honestly as you can. Please checkmark the appropriate answer(s), circle answers when instructed to do so, and fill-in answers when needed.

1. Do you adhere to caste strictures?

- (0) Yes (1) No
(2) Partially (3) I do not know

2. What is your caste ancestry?

Note: You may select more than one response here. For example, if your father is a Vaishya and a Kshatriya (because one of your grandparents is a Vaishya and the other one is a Kshatriya) and your mother is a Brahmin (because both of your grandparents are Brahmins), please select all three categories of Vaishya, Kshatriya, and Brahmin.

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
(3) Shudra (4) I do not know

3. What do you consider to be your primary caste identity (please choose **one** answer only)?

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
(3) Shudra (4) I do not know

²¹ The questions in this section are influenced by the General Social Survey (GSS) 1998 codebook.

4. How religious do you consider yourself to be?
 (0) Extremely religious (1) Somewhat religious
 (2) Not religious
5. What is your current marital status?
 (0) Married (1) Separated
 (2) Divorced (3) Widowed

If your answer to question 5 is "Separated", "Divorced", or "Widowed", please skip to question 7.

6. Is this your first marriage?
 (0) Yes (1) No What #? ____

If your answer to question 6 is "Yes", please skip to question 8.

7. How many times have you been... (please circle the appropriate answer)
 A) Divorced? (0) 0 (1) 1 (2) 2 (3) 3 (4) 4+
 B) Widowed? (0) 0 (1) 1 (2) 2 (3) 3 (4) 4+

8. What is your father's caste ancestry?

Note: You may select more than one response here. For example, if your paternal grandfather is a Vaishya and a Kshatriya (because one of your great grandparents is a Vaishya and the other one is a Kshatriya) and your paternal grandmother is a Brahmin (because both of your great grandparents are Brahmins), please select all three caste categories.

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
 (3) Shudra (4) I do not know

If your answer to question 8 is "NA", please skip to question 10.

9. What do you think is your father's primary caste identity (please choose **one** answer only)?

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
 (3) Shudra (4) I do not know

10. What is your mother's caste ancestry?

Note: You may select more than one response here. For example, if your maternal grandfather is a Vaishya and a Kshatriya (because one of your great grandparents is a Vaishya and the other one is a Kshatriya) and your maternal grandmother is a Brahmin (because both of your great grandparents are Brahmins), please select all three caste categories.

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
 (3) Shudra (4) I do not know

If your answer to question 10 is "NA", please skip to question 12.

11. What do you think is your mother's primary caste identity (please choose **one** answer only)?

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
 (3) Shudra (4) I do not know

12. How old are you?
 (0) _ Under 30 (1) _ 30-35 (2) _ 36-40 (3) _ 41-45
 (4) _ 46-50 (5) _ 51-55 (6) _ 56-60 (7) _ Over 60
13. When did you immigrate to the United States?
 (0) _ 1970 (1) _ 1971 (2) _ 1972 (3) _ 1973 (4) _ 1974
 (5) _ 1975 (6) _ 1976 (7) _ 1977 (8) _ 1978 (9) _ 1979
 (10)_ 1980 (11)_ 1981 (12)_ 1982 (13)_ 1983 (14)_ 1984
 (15)_ 1985 (16)_ 1986 (17)_ 1987 (18)_ 1989
14. How old were you the year you immigrated to the United States?
 (0) _ Under 30 (1) _ 30-35 (2) _ 36-40 (3) _ 41-45
 (4) _ 46-50 (5) _ 51-55 (6) _ 56-60 (7) _ Over 60
15. Where were you born?
 (0) _ North India City/State? _____
 (1) _ South India
 (2) _ Other (3) _ I do not know
16. Where was your father born?
 (0) _ North India City/State? _____
 (1) _ South India
 (2) _ Other (3) _ I do not know
17. Where was your mother born?
 (0) _ North India City/State? _____
 (1) _ South India
 (2) _ Other (3) _ I do not know
18. Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed according to American educational standards.
 (0) _ Grammar school
 (1) _ High school or equivalent
 (2) _ Vocational/Technical School/Associate's Degree (2 years)
 (3) _ Some college
 (4) _ College graduate (BS or BA)
 (5) _ Masters degree (MS or MA)
 (6) _ Doctoral degree (Ph.D)
 (7) _ Professional degree (MD, JD, MBA, etc.)
 (8) _ Other What degree or certificate? _____

19. Please indicate the highest level of education your father completed according to American educational standards.

- (0) _ Grammar school
- (1) _ High school or equivalent
- (2) _ Vocational/Technical School/Associate's Degree (2 years)
- (3) _ Some college
- (4) _ College graduate (BS or BA)
- (5) _ Masters degree (MS or MA)
- (6) _ Doctoral degree (Ph.D)
- (7) _ Professional degree (MD, JD, MBA, etc.)
- (8) _ Other What degree or certificate? _____

20. Please indicate the highest level of education your mother completed according to American educational standards.

- (0) _ Grammar school
- (1) _ High school or equivalent
- (2) _ Vocational/Technical School/Associate's Degree (2 years)
- (3) _ Some college
- (4) _ College graduate (BS or BA)
- (5) _ Masters degree (MS or MA)
- (6) _ Doctoral degree (Ph.D)
- (7) _ Professional degree (MD, JD, MBA, etc.)
- (8) _ Other What degree or certificate? _____

21. What do you do for a living (you may choose **more than one** answer)?

- (0) _ Homemaker (1) _ Student (2) _ Unskilled laborer
- (3) _ Skilled laborer (4) _ Administrative (5) _ Management
- (6) _ Trained professional State profession _____
- (7) _ Other Please explain _____

22. What does (or did if retired or deceased) your father do for a living (you may choose **more than one** answer)?

- (0) _ Homemaker (1) _ Student (2) _ Unskilled laborer
- (3) _ Skilled laborer (4) _ Administrative (5) _ Management
- (6) _ Trained professional State profession _____
- (7) _ Other Please explain _____

23. What does (or did if retired or deceased) your mother do for a living (you may choose **more than one** answer)?

- (0) _ Homemaker (1) _ Student (2) _ Unskilled laborer
- (3) _ Skilled laborer (4) _ Administrative (5) _ Management
- (6) _ Trained professional State profession _____
- (7) _ Other Please explain _____

24. Please indicate your **individual** income in U.S. dollars.
 (0) _ Under \$10,000 (1) _ \$10,000-\$29,000 (2) _ \$30,000-\$49,000
 (3) _ \$50,000-\$69,000 (4) _ \$70,000-\$89,000 (5) _ \$90,000-\$100,000
 (6) _ Over \$100,000 (7) _ I do not know

25. Please indicate your current **household** income in U.S. dollars.
 Note: "Household income" includes only you and your current husband's wages/salary, investments, etc. If your most recent husband is deceased, please include any benefits, such as his life insurance, Social Security, etc., that you may be receiving.

Note: "Husband" refers to current husband (deceased or living) or most recent ex-husband (deceased or living) if currently not married. If you have a boyfriend or fiancée, please answer the questions in terms of your most recent husband (deceased or living) whom you are no longer with.

- (0) _ Under \$10,000 (1) _ \$10,000-\$29,000 (2) _ \$30,000-\$49,000
 (3) _ \$50,000-\$69,000 (4) _ \$70,000-\$89,000 (5) _ \$90,000-\$100,000
 (6) _ Over \$100,000 (7) _ I do not know

26. How many homes do (or did if no longer together) you and your husband own?

Note: "Husband" refers to current husband (deceased or living) or most recent ex-husband (deceased or living) if currently not married. If you have a boyfriend or fiancée, please answer the questions in terms of your most recent husband (deceased or living) whom you are no longer with.

- (0) _ None (1) _ One (2) _ Two (3) _ Three or more
 (4) _ I do not know

27. How many cars do (or did if no longer together) you and your husband own?

Note: "Husband" refers to current husband (deceased or living) or most recent ex-husband (deceased or living) if currently not married. If you have a boyfriend or fiancée, please answer the questions in terms of your most recent husband (deceased or living) whom you are no longer with.

- (0) _ None (1) _ One (2) _ Two (3) _ Three or more
 (4) _ I do not know

28. Please indicate your parent's household income in U.S. dollars.

Note: "Household income" includes your father and mother only. If they are separated or one is deceased or both are deceased, please answer for when they were together.

- (0) _ Under \$10,000 (1) _ \$10,000-\$29,000 (2) _ \$30,000-\$49,000
 (3) _ \$50,000-\$69,000 (4) _ \$70,000-\$89,000 (5) _ \$90,000-\$100,000
 (6) _ Over \$100,000 (7) _ I do not know

29. How many houses do (or did if divorced or deceased) your parents own **together**?

- (0) _ None (1) _ One (2) _ Two (3) _ Three or more
 (4) _ I do not know

30. How many cars do (or did if divorced or deceased) your parents own **together**?
- (0) None (1) One (2) Two (3) Three or more
 (4) I do not know

PART II: MARRIAGE

Instructions

This section asks you questions about your husband. Answer all the questions as best and honestly as you can. Please checkmark the appropriate answer(s), circle answers when instructed to do so, and fill-in answers when asked.

Note: When responding the questions in this section, please remember that “husband” refers to current husband (deceased or living) or most recent ex-husband (deceased or living) if currently not married. If you have a boyfriend or fiancée, please answer the questions in terms of your most recent husband (deceased or living) whom you are no longer with. Similarly, “in-laws” refer to most recent in-laws or most recent ex-in-laws, deceased or living.

1. What is you husband’s caste ancestry?

Note: You may select more than one response. For example, if your husband’s father is a Vaishya and a Kshatriya (because one of his grandparents is a Vaishya and the other one is a Kshatriya) and his mother is a Brahmin (because both of his grandparents are Brahmins), please select all three categories. If one of his parents is not Hindu-Indian, please also select “He is of mixed Hindu-Indian origin” and let me know which parent is not of that origin.

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya (3) Shudra
 (4) He is of mixed Hindu-Indian origin, Explain _____
 (5) I do not know
 (6) NA (not of Hindu-Indian origin)

If your answer to question 1 is “NA”, please skip to question 3.

2. What do you think is your husband’s primary caste identity (please choose **one** answer)?
- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
 (3) Shudra (4) I do not know
3. How would you classify your husband’s skin tone **among Hindu-Indians** in general?
- (0) The color of weak tea with milk
 (1) The color of light brown sugar
 (2) The color of caramel
 (3) The color of burnt sugar
 (4) The color of coffee beans
4. What year did you marry (please fill-in year)? _____

5. How old were you when you married (please answer for **first marriage** only)?

- (0) _ Under 20 (1) _ 20-24 (2) _ 25-29 (3) _ 30-35
 (4) _ 36-40 (5) _ 41-45 (6) _ 46-50 (7) _ 51-55
 (8) _ 56-60 (9) _ Over 60

6. How old was your husband at the time of marriage (please answer for **first marriage** only)?

- (0) _ Under 20 (1) _ 20-24 (2) _ 25-29 (3) _ 30-35
 (4) _ 36-40 (5) _ 41-45 (6) _ 46-50 (7) _ 51-55
 (8) _ 56-60 (9) _ Over 60

7. How would you classify your husband's skin tone **within his primary caste** identity (if he is not of Hindu-Indian origin or you do not know his primary caste identity, then please classify your husband's skin tone **within your primary caste identity**; if you do not know your primary caste identity, then select "I do not know")?

- (0) _ Extremely light (1) _ Somewhat light
 (2) _ Somewhat dark (3) _ Extremely dark
 (4) _ I do not know

8. What is your father-in-law's caste ancestry?

Note: You may select more than one response here. For example, if his father is a Vaishya and a Kshatriya (because one of his grandparents is a Vaishya and the other one is a Kshatriya) and his mother is a Brahmin (because both of his grandparents are Brahmins), please select all three categories. If one of his parents is not Hindu-Indian, please also select "He is of mixed Hindu-Indian origin" (in addition to caste ancestry of the Hindu-Indian parent) and let me know which parent is not of Hindu and/or Indian origin.

- (0) _ Brahmin (1) _ Kshatriya (2) _ Vaishya (3) _ Shudra
 (4) _ He is of mixed Hindu-Indian origin, Explain _____
 (5) _ I do not know
 (6) _ NA (not of Hindu-Indian origin)

If your answer to question 8 is "NA", please skip to question 10.

9. What do you think is your father-in-law's primary caste identity (please choose **one** answer)?

- (0) _ Brahmin (1) _ Kshatriya (2) _ Vaishya
 (3) _ Shudra (4) _ I do not know

10. What is your mother-in-law's caste identity?

Note: You may select more than one response here. For example, if her father is a Vaishya and a Kshatriya (because one of her grandparents is a Vaishya and the other one is a Kshatriya) and her mother is a Brahmin (because both of her grandparents are Brahmins), please select all three categories. If one of her parents is not Hindu-Indian, please also select "She is of mixed Hindu-Indian origin" (in addition to caste ancestry of the Hindu-Indian parent) and let me know which parent is not of Hindu and/or Indian origin.

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya (3) Shudra
 (4) He is of mixed Hindu-Indian origin, Explain _____
 (5) I do not know
 (6) NA (not of Hindu-Indian origin)

If your answer to question 10 is "NA", please skip to question 12.

11. What do you think is your mother-in-law's primary caste identity (please choose **one** answer)?

- (0) Brahmin (1) Kshatriya (2) Vaishya
 (3) Shudra (4) I do not know

12. How old is your husband?

- (0) Under 30 (1) 30-35 (2) 36-40 (3) 41-45
 (4) 46-50 (5) 51-55 (6) 56-60 (7) Over 60
 (8) I do not know

13. Where was your husband born?

- (0) North India City/State? _____
 (1) South India
 (2) Other (3) I do not know

14. Where was your father-in-law born?

- (0) North India City/State? _____
 (1) South India
 (2) Other (3) I do not know

15. Where was your mother-in-law born?

- (0) North India City/State? _____
 (1) South India
 (2) Other (3) I do not know

16. Please indicate the highest level of education your husband completed according to American educational standards.
- (0) _ Grammar school
 - (1) _ High school or equivalent
 - (2) _ Vocational/Technical School/Associate's Degree (2 years)
 - (3) _ Some college
 - (4) _ College graduate (BS or BA)
 - (5) _ Masters degree (MS or MA)
 - (6) _ Doctoral degree (Ph.D)
 - (7) _ Professional degree (MD, JD, MBA, etc.)
 - (8) _ Other What degree or certificate? _____
17. Please indicate the highest level of education your father-in-law completed according to American educational standards.
- (0) _ Grammar school
 - (1) _ High school or equivalent
 - (2) _ Vocational/Technical School/Associate's Degree (2 years)
 - (3) _ Some college
 - (4) _ College graduate (BS or BA)
 - (5) _ Masters degree (MS or MA)
 - (6) _ Doctoral degree (Ph.D)
 - (7) _ Professional degree (MD, JD, MBA, etc.)
 - (8) _ Other What degree or certificate? _____
18. Please indicate the highest level of education your mother-in-law completed according to American educational standards.
- (0) _ Grammar school
 - (1) _ High school or equivalent
 - (2) _ Vocational/Technical School/Associate's Degree (2 years)
 - (3) _ Some college
 - (4) _ College graduate (BS or BA)
 - (5) _ Masters degree (MS or MA)
 - (6) _ Doctoral degree (Ph.D)
 - (7) _ Professional degree (MD, JD, MBA, etc.)
 - (8) _ Other What degree or certificate? _____
19. What does (or did if retired or deceased) your husband do for a living (you may choose **more than one** answer)?
- (0) _ Homemaker (1) _ Student (2) _ Unskilled laborer
 - (3) _ Skilled laborer (4) _ Administrative (5) _ Management
 - (6) _ Trained professional State profession _____
 - (7) _ Other Please explain _____

20. What does (or did if retired or deceased) your father-in-law do for a living (you may choose **more than one** answer)?
- (0) _ Homemaker (1) _ Student (2) _ Unskilled laborer
(3) _ Skilled laborer (4) _ Administrative (5) _ Management
(6) _ Trained professional State profession _____
(7) _ Other Please explain _____
21. What does (or did of retired or living) your mother-in-law do for a living (you may choose **more than one** answer)?
- (0) _ Homemaker (1) _ Student (2) _ Unskilled laborer
(3) _ Skilled laborer (4) _ Administrative (5) _ Management
(6) _ Trained professional State profession _____
(7) _ Other Please explain _____
22. Please indicate your in-law's household income in U.S. dollars.
Note: "Household income" includes your father-in-law and mother-in-laws only. If they are separated or one is deceased or both are deceased, please answer for when they were together.
- (0) _ Under \$10,000 (1) _ \$10,000-\$29,000 (2) _ \$30,000-\$49,000
(3) _ \$50,000-\$69,000 (4) _ \$70,000-\$89,000 (5) _ \$90,000-\$100,000
(6) _ Over \$100,000 (7) _ I do not know
23. How many homes do (or did if separated or deceased) your in-laws own together?
- (0) _ None (1) _ One (2) _ Two (3) _ Three or more
(4) _ I do not know
24. How many cars do (or did if separated or deceased) your in-laws own together?
- (0) _ None (1) _ One (2) _ Two (3) _ Three or more
(4) _ I do not know
25. How many people attended your wedding (if you have been married more than once, please answer for your **first wedding**)?
- (0) _ Less than 20 (1) _ 21-50 (2) _ 51-100 (3) _ 101-300
(4) _ 301-500 (5) _ Over 500 (6) _ I do not know

PART III: BEAUTY AND ATTRACTIVENESS

Instructions

This section asks you questions about what you feel about your appearance. Answer all the questions as best and honestly as you can. Please checkmark the appropriate answer(s), circle answers when instructed to do so, and fill-in answers when asked.

Note: When responding to questions in this section, please remember that “skin tone” and “skin complexion” refers to skin color.

- How would you classify your skin tone **in relation to Hindu-Indians** in general?

<input type="checkbox"/> (0) _ Extremely light	<input type="checkbox"/> (1) _ Somewhat light
<input type="checkbox"/> (2) _ Somewhat dark	<input type="checkbox"/> (3) _ Extremely dark
- How would you classify your skin tone **within your primary caste** identity?

<input type="checkbox"/> (0) _ Extremely light	<input type="checkbox"/> (1) _ Somewhat light	<input type="checkbox"/> (2) _ Somewhat dark
<input type="checkbox"/> (3) _ Extremely dark	<input type="checkbox"/> (4) _ I do not know	
- How satisfied are you with the shade (lightness or darkness) of your own skin color?²²

<input type="checkbox"/> (0) _ Extremely dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/> (1) _ Somewhat dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> (2) _ Somewhat satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/> (3) _ Extremely satisfied
- Compared to most white American people, I believe my skin color is...

<input type="checkbox"/> (0) _ Extremely dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/> (1) _ Somewhat dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> (2) _ Somewhat satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/> (3) _ Extremely satisfied
- Compared to most black American people, I believe my skin color is...

<input type="checkbox"/> (0) _ Extremely dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/> (1) _ Somewhat dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> (2) _ Somewhat satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/> (3) _ Extremely satisfied
- If I could change my skin color, I would make it...

<input type="checkbox"/> (0) _ Much lighter	<input type="checkbox"/> (1) _ Somewhat lighter
<input type="checkbox"/> (2) _ Somewhat darker	<input type="checkbox"/> (3) _ Much darker
<input type="checkbox"/> (4) _ I do not want to change my skin color	

²² The next four questions, including this one, are adapted from Bond and Cash's (1992) Skin Color Questionnaire (SCQ). The scale is located in:

7. My ideal skin complexion is (please **circle** the appropriate answer):²³
- (0) Exactly as I am (1) Almost as I Am
(2) Fairly unlike me (3) Very unlike me
8. How important to you is your ideal skin complexion (please **circle** the appropriate answer)?
- (0) Not important (1) Somewhat important
(2) Moderately important (3) Very important
9. How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with your face in general?
- (0) Very dissatisfied (1) Mostly dissatisfied
(2) Mostly satisfied (3) Very satisfied
10. I am physically attractive.
- (0) Definitely disagree (1) Mostly disagree
(2) Mostly agree (3) Definitely agree
11. I like my looks just the way they are.²⁴
- (0) Definitely disagree (1) Mostly disagree
(2) Mostly agree (3) Definitely agree
12. Most people would consider me good looking.
- (0) Definitely disagree (1) Mostly disagree
(2) Mostly agree (3) Definitely agree

²³ The next two questions, including this one, are adapted from the Body Image-Ideal Questionnaire (BIQ) (Cash and Szymanski 1995). The BIQ was purchased directly from Dr. Cash.

²⁴ The next two questions, including this one, are adapted from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSQR) (Brown, Cash, and Mikulka 1990; Cash 2000b). The MBSQR was purchased directly from Dr. Cash.

PART IV: CASTE/CLASS, SKIN COLOR, AND
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Instructions

This last and final section asks you to provide some insight on the roles of caste, skin color, and socioeconomic status (i.e. wealth, education, and occupation) in marriage. Answer all the questions as best and honestly as you can. Please checkmark the appropriate answer(s), circle answers when instructed to do so, fill-in answers when needed, and write a small paragraph when asked to. If you need more room when writing your paragraph, please continue on the back of the page.

1. Did you have an arranged or love marriage (if you have been married more than once, please answer for your **first marriage**)?
 (0) Love (1) Arranged

2. If selecting an intimate long-term partner on your own without parental involvement (love marriage), which is most important to you?
 Note: If you choose "Other" and your explanation is "overall attractiveness" or "physical attraction", please elaborate on your definition of "attractive".
 (0) Caste (1) Socioeconomic/financial status
 (2) Skin color (3) Other, Explain

(4) I do not approve of love marriage

If your answer to question 2 is "I do not approve of love marriage", then please skip to question 7.

3. If selecting an intimate long-term partner on your own without parental involvement (love marriage), which is **second-most important** to you?
 (0) Caste (1) Socioeconomic/financial status
 (2) Skin color (3) Other, Explain

-
4. If selecting an intimate long-term partner on your own without parental involvement (love marriage), which is **third-most important** to you?
 (0) Caste (1) Socioeconomic/financial status
 (2) Skin color (3) Other, Explain
-

5. Which criterion would be most important to your parents in accepting your marriage to a partner you have chosen without parental involvement (love marriage)?
- (0) _ Caste (1) _ Socioeconomic/financial status
(2) _ Skin color (3) _ Other, Explain
-

(4) _ I do not know
(5) _ NA (my parents would accept anyone I wanted to marry)
If your answer to question 5 is "NA", please skip to question 7.

6. If your parents do not accept the partner you have chosen for yourself for marriage, would you elope?
- (0) _ Yes
(1) _ No (I would break up with my boyfriend, I would have an affair with him, etc.)
(2) _ I do not know
7. Which sequence of criteria is most important to your parents in accepting an arranged marriage proposal for you?
Please order from 1 to 3 with 1 being the most important.
(0) _ Caste (1) _ Skin color (2) _ Socioeconomic status
OR, select one of the answers below.
(0) _ None of the three variables above are important
(1) _ I do not know
Explain your selection(s)
-

8. What role do you think **caste** plays in **arranged marriages** in Hindu-Indian communities?
-

9. What role do you think **caste** plays in **love marriages** in Hindu-Indian communities?
-

10. What role do you think **socioeconomic status** (i.e. wealth, education, and family and groom occupation) plays in **arranged marriages** in Hindu-Indian communities?
-

11. What role do you think **socioeconomic status** (i.e. wealth, education, and family and groom occupation) plays in **love marriages** in Hindu-Indian communities?
-

12. What role do you think **skin color** plays in **arranged marriages** in Hindu-Indian communities?

13. What role do you think **skin color** plays in **love marriages** in Hindu-Indian communities?

14. Please list, in order of importance, the most crucial criteria (in general) within the Hindu-Indian community in selecting a bride for a son. Please state why you think the criteria you have chosen are so important to Hindu-Indians.

15. Please list, in order of importance, the most crucial criteria (in general) within the Hindu-Indian community in selecting a groom for a daughter. Please state why you think the criteria you have chosen are so important to Hindu-Indians.

PART V: FEEDBACK

1. Approximately how long did it take you to complete the survey questionnaire? _____
2. Do you have any comments (strengths, weaknesses, improvements, etc.) regarding the design of the questionnaire?

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HARD WORK!

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India: Ethnic Democracy or Electoral Defect? The Assam Movement and The Hindu Concept of Order Revisited

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In this paper I address the concept of ethnic democracy in the Indian context by simply posing the question, "Is India an ethnic democracy?" To answer this question I have chosen to examine the Assam Movement (1979–1985). This movement was by and large a cultural movement led by the Assamese elite with the intent to wrest more regional (state of Assam) control from the Indian central government in order to preserve the distinct culture of the Assamese (*vis-à-vis* non-Assamese Indians, Bangladeshis, Hindus, and Muslims). A large portion of the Assamese masses participated in this uprising making it truly a mass movement representative of the people. Given that the Assam Movement is largely representative of the Assamese will, versus that of the Indian central government, I believe that it indicates, at worst, a breakdown in the central government's ability to govern effectively and at best, a weakening of the central government's claim to represent the interests of all of its citizens.

THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

While exploring the causes of unrest in Assam that led to the Assam Movement, I also began looking for comparable disturbances, i.e. conflicts, in India in hopes that similar events might indicate a pattern. Aware of India's history of ethnic (cultural, linguistic, and religious) conflict, I was not convinced that the Assam Movement was an anomaly. Other groups in the Northeast region had similar disagreements with the central government's authority and many of the causes for disaffection were the same. For this reason, I looked for an ethnic group that, like the Assamese, resisted the central government, but whose dissatisfaction with Indian rule stemmed from some other source.

I suggest that these elements are exemplified by the Khalistan Movement in Punjab, a secessionist movement led by extremist/fundamentalist Sikhs for the creation of an independent Sikh country/homeland called Khalistan—"the land of the pure". I came across a work by Gurburhal Singh in which he made the convincing argument that India is an ethnic

democracy (Singh, 2000). His investigation of the Khalistan Movement led him to conclude that there was indeed something faulty about the historical formation and subsequent development of the government of the Republic of India. The aspect of his argument that I examine is his contention that the government has an essentially Hindu character owing to the overwhelming cultural, political, and religious influence of the Hindu majority in India.

At first glance, this argument might not appear to be applicable to Assam because most of the Assamese were Hindu. The Khalistani conflict in Punjab was between Sikhs (Khalistanis) and the central government that, in the eyes of the Khalistanis, was a Hindu government. However, the similarity of the Assam movement lies in the fact that many Assamese Hindus prided themselves on being the heirs to a particular sect of Hinduism distinct from other, more mainstream sects. They also identified with other cultural roots that were clearly not part of the Indian mainstream.¹ Furthermore, the Assamese attempted to distance themselves from the exceedingly large and culturally dominant neighboring Bengali populations of Manipur (a state in which the native Manipuris are outnumbered by Indian and Bangladeshi Bengalis), West Bengal, and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan). So, in the Khalistan Movement, I had come upon a line of reasoning that closely paralleled that of the Assamese—mainstream Indian Hindus set the tone for governance in India.

Realizing that there are certain factors in the Assamese case that make it distinct from the Khalistan Movement, I nevertheless became convinced that Gurpurhal Singh's argument that India is an ethnic democracy was the best line of argumentation for me to follow. Singh relied on one particular theory by anthropologist Cynthia Mahmood, her theory of the Hindu Concept of Order (1989).

In her theory of the Hindu Concept of Order, Mahmood constructs a paradigm with which she attempts to explain the flow of India's historical development. She argues that India is, has been, and perhaps always will be a Hindu land. Further, she claims that it is this Hinduism that makes India tick; it influences the way politics, society, and religion operate, and it determines the characteristics of authority and control in India. In sum, Hinduism provides a template for cultural, political, and religious organization in which the majority of Indians, the Hindus, dominate.

It is within this in/out group scenario between Hindus and non-Hindus that Mahmood explores the Khalistani Movement in Punjab. After a brief

¹ Much of Assam's historical development arose from the cultural influence of the Ahoms who migrated to Assam from Southeast Asia in the thirteenth century.

examination of Mahmood's works, one quickly discovers her sympathies to the Khalistani movement (1989; 1996). Being convinced that the largely Hindu central government of India is responsible for many of the woes of the Sikh population, she accepts the validity of the Hindu Concept of Order (to say nothing of that fact that the theory is her own creation). That she overlooked the large body of scholarly debate on this very issue—whether or not Hinduism represents an ever constant force or is, in fact, an ever changing phenomenon—is troublesome.

Therefore, I will make it clear that I am not defending Mahmood's Hindu Concept of Order, nor am I entering into the larger discussion that she ignored. What I am doing is examining the Assam Movement by building on the argumentation of Gurburhal Singh and using the in/out group scenario that he employed. Whether or not Mahmood is correct is irrelevant to this paper. While her theory may be flawed, Singh might be right when he asserts that the peculiar nature of India's democracy creates contests between ethnic groups. In short, I think Singh's argument is on the right track, though on a shaky foundation.

ETHNICITY, ETHNIC CONFLICT, ETHNIC HEGEMONY AND ETHNIC DEMOCRACY

Before discussing whether or not the Assam Movement is the result of India being an ethnic democracy, I think it is prudent to examine a few terms. The following paragraphs explain the terms ethnicity, ethnic conflict, ethnic hegemony and ethnic democracy. While these terms are of course subject to further discussion, I will employ the following delineations in this paper.

Ethnicity is a fluid identity marker that may encompass objective features such as caste, color, diet, dress, language, religion, and tribe as well as subjective features which are relative to group mobilization related to these features (Singh 2000, 35–36; Brass 1991, 18–19). One's ethnicity may be defined by these features in any number of combinations. Ethnicity may sometimes be ascriptive, self-identified, and innate; it may be cultural, psychological, and biological in nature. In sum, someone's ethnicity may be identified by their language, religion, physical appearance, own confession, perception of another, or any combination of these factors. For example, if someone dresses in traditional Hindu dress, speaks a language associated with Hindus, practices Hinduism, is considered by others to be a Hindu, and admits to being a Hindu, then this individual is, for all practical purposes, ethnically Hindu.

Next, any discussion of ethnic conflict is further complicated by the nature of a conflict and how that conflict is defined. The following arguments

most closely fit my own understanding of ethnic conflict. According to Daniel Byman, ethnic tension and ethnic conflict are related concepts that are often difficult to distinguish (2002, 5) because conflict is often associated with violence. Ashutosh Varshney makes a similar distinction between ethnic conflict and ethnic violence. He argues that ethnic conflict should not always be considered violent and that periods of peace should be seen as devoid of violence (2002, 24–25). Therefore there are three categories: ethnic tension that indicates an ethnic cleavage; ethnic conflict that demonstrates competition between ethnic groups; and ethnic violence that occurs when ethnic groups are unable to peacefully resolve their differences. Often, when one ethnic group wields power over one or more other ethnic groups, ethnic conflict represents the minority groups' challenge to the hegemony of the power-wielding group. In short, an ethnic conflict is a struggle for power between ethnically defined groups.

When the basis for political mobilization in multi-ethnic countries is ethnicity, and institutional features ensure that one ethnic group possesses dominant control, the result is that the dominant ethnic group determines the nature of the relationship between itself and other groups.² This phenomenon is ethnic hegemony. When it is embodied in the political culture and operation of a democratic country, that country becomes an ethnic democracy (Singh 2000, 45–50). According to Yoav Peled, an ethnic democracy is “a political system combining democratic institutions with the dominance of one ethnic group” (1992, 432). The basis for ethnic hegemony in an ethnic democracy may be explicit (*de jure*) or implicit (*de facto*). That is to say, at some point during the country's development, the ethnic majority becomes linked to the political identity of the country, thus priority status is given to the majority group and its interests. The dominant group relegates the minority groups to varying levels of inferior status accompanied by a set of rights and privileges, political and social, which are distinct from those of the dominant group.

The different rights and privileges that members of majority and minority ethnic groups hold within ethnic democracies can affect the character of the individual's citizenship and of the country's citizenry. Peled, in his study of Israel, has made the distinction between two types of citizenship—republican and liberal (1992). Republican and liberal notions of citizenship stem from different philosophies of civic culture and the citizen's role in the country, whether active or passive, respectively. The liberal citizen is a “passive bearer of status (a mere bundle of rights),” and the republican

² For the purpose of this work dominant and majority will both be used to mean “the ethnic group that wields power.”

citizen is one who engages in “practice (active participation in the determination, protection, and promotion of the common good)” (Peled 1992, 433). Membership in the inferior or dominant ethnic group determines whether an individual’s citizenship is liberal or republican. The civic culture and civic communities within a country determine citizenship type. Peled has further distinguished two types of communities, weak and strong, wherein “a weak community, constituted by deliberation, membership in which is essentially voluntary and a strong, historical community that is discovered, not formed by its members” (1992, 433). The weak community has an inclusive nature, and its members may choose to be passive or active in the political process. The strong community, on the other hand, is exclusive, and its members are expected to participate actively in the political process (Peled 1992, 433–434). “Moreover, the basis for exclusion from the strong community is at least partly ascriptive, since membership...cannot be entirely a matter of choice” (Peled 1992, 434)—one’s ethnicity is often determined by the perception of others.

In order to satisfy the values and expectations of modern democracies, those individuals or groups that are not accepted into the strong community are then awarded something along the lines of liberal citizenship (Peled 1992, 434). Although marginalized, their civil and human rights are relatively secure, but these people are not permitted (or are unable) to fully participate in the political process. The nature of ethnic democracies forms a spectrum wherein some are explicit and others are implicit, and the impact on the citizenry is dependent upon the factors specific to each country. Therefore, the character of liberal citizenship or something like legal residency status may vary from country to country. Nevertheless, distinctions are made between individuals and groups that determine their status within a country.

THE HINDU CONCEPT OF ORDER

Below, I will present Cynthia Mahmood’s notion of the “Hindu Concept of Order,” which she introduced in her article “Sikh Rebellion and the Hindu Concept of Order” (1989). In this work Mahmood explains the rise and fall of Sikh nationalism as part of a natural process in which individuals or groups of Indians periodically leave the Hindu mainstream which attempts, often successfully, to bring them back within it.

Mahmood asserts that “the absorption of previous religious heterodoxies such as Buddhism into the Hindu system has provided a model for modern Hindu expectations of non-Hindu religions, and has served as a negative example for those [groups] intent on retaining a separate religious identity, such as the Sikhs” (Mahmood 1989, 326). Mahmood analyzes Sikh rebellion

against the Indian National Congress Party during the nationalist movement and freedom struggle and against the Congress-led central government during independence as part of the same phenomenon. She asserts that the campaigns by Hindu organizations, such as the Arya Samaj, to unify the people of India into one ethnic nation during the nineteenth century were attempts to “[readmit] people who had converted to...other faiths back into Hinduism” (Mahmood 1989, 334). She argues further that this process of attempting to bring groups back within Hinduism in order to fashion a Hindu society provided a template for successive nationalist campaigns, Hindu and non-Hindu. Due to the dominance of Hindus in the nationalist program, Hinduism became linked to their vision of Indian national identity early on and would persist despite attempts to create a more Western type of rule.

Mahmood contends that Nehru was less Hindu-centric than later leaders (Mahmood 1989, 335). However she does not discount that the “peculiar Indian notion of secularism, the idea that tolerance to all faiths should be encouraged on the grounds that all represent different paths to the same universal truth,” is quite different from the Western notion of secularism in “which one’s religious beliefs are in no way the concern of the state” (Mahmood 1989, 339–340). Nehru subscribed to the Indian notion of secularism. By seeking to base the rules for admission into the new Indian society on patterns from Hindu tradition, the Congress leadership created a paradigm in which resistance to Congress control was at the same time a rejection of Hinduism.

Mahmood says “Hinduism, seen over the long term, is a dynamic pattern of domination, rebellion, and incorporation, always transforming itself but maintaining its characteristic social order” (1989, 339). The basis of this social order, she contends, is, of course, the caste system — the hierarchical system into which members of Hindu (and much of Indian) society are born and which largely helps to define their social status. Caste regulations dictate to greater and lesser degrees how Hindus should live their lives and focus particularly on social interaction.

Members of the high-caste communities traditionally avoid contact with members of the low-caste communities. When high-caste people encounter low-caste people they typically feel compelled to participate in rituals to remove the pollution they acquired and restore their purity. Therefore, many high-caste Hindus attempt to avoid unnecessary contact with low-caste people. In addition to being considered unclean, low-caste people are commonly servants or laborers for the higher castes, relegated to an inferior status. Many of these low-caste people belong to ethnic groups distinct from those of the high-caste groups. The ritual importance of caste has declined, but the use of caste as marker of social identity and boundary persists.

Not surprisingly, caste oppression and the rigidity of the Hindu Order have inspired many members of low-caste society to leave the Hindu fold by creating a new religion or converting to another religion. Mahmood points to the Buddhist and Jain movements as the earliest examples of this trend. Hindus later attempted to co-opt Buddhism by adopting some of its more radical teachings and claiming that the Buddha was an incarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu (Mahmood 1989, 338).³ They did not, however, eliminate caste distinction as the Buddha attempted to do. Therefore, Buddhism, a split-off religion, was brought back within Hinduism as a distinct sect and its followers became subject to caste regulation.⁴

Many Hindus consider Sikhs to be a caste group within the larger Hindu community, but due to their rejection of particular customs regarding purity, they are considered unclean. When nationalist groups like the Arya Samaj attempted to reconvert Sikhs back into mainstream Hindu society, they insisted that Sikhs undergo rituals to restore their purity (Mahmood 1989, 334). Many Sikhs rejected these rituals as well as Hindu organizations and began organizing within the social framework of Sikh society, distinct from that of Hindu society.

This pattern of re-assimilation has caused “critics [to] point out that it [Hinduism] is a tradition that cannot respect true otherness, but can only assimilate otherness to Hinduism, which is then accorded legitimate respect” (Mahmood 1989, 339). Native converts to non-Hindu religions would, in effect, trade one caste for the other, a change that did not necessarily free the individual or group from caste discrimination. These aspects of Hinduism would have a monumental impact on the movement for democracy in the freedom movement and the period of Independence.

In sum, Mahmood argues that Hindu dominance in national organization and the central authority has fashioned a Hindu-centric political order that treats non-Hindu groups as if they were Hindus.⁵ In other words, the Hindu leadership, especially in Congress, has been unable to discard its Hindu

³ Again, Mahmood has chosen sides in yet another debate. It is likely that Hinduism, Hindu society, and politics within a largely Hindu society played a significant role in the decline Buddhism’s importance in ancient India. However, as her logic suggests, it was not so quick, nor direct.

⁴ Upon its adoption in 1951, the Indian Constitution officially outlawed caste based discrimination.

⁵ For example, according to Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are considered Hindus. Political representatives of these cultural and religious groups accepted this provision in order to qualify for reservations in government employment—the Indian version of affirmative action intended to remedy centuries of caste based discrimination.

proclivities and has not been sensitive to the needs of non-Hindus. This type of interaction has created a paradigm of governance—transplanted from the religious to the political sphere—in which minority groups tend to rebel against a central Hindu identity when they rebel against the central authority. Under these particular circumstances it would then seem that non-Hindu ethnic or religious nationalism is both political and religious heresy.

Mahmood makes a convincing argument for the Hindu Concept of Order. It sounds interesting and is definitely intriguing, but is it correct? Mahmood does successfully bring to the attention of scholars the idea that there might be something terribly wrong with ethnic, religious and social relations in India. Her work indicates that the formation of political institutions and social organization may be responsible for much of the ethnic conflict between Hindus and non-Hindus. Nevertheless, she glosses over the debate about the history of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism to construct a simplistic theoretical construction that can simply not withstand scrutiny. Instead, her theory only serves to justify crimes against humanity by placing the blame on some unseen force. This, I think not only renders this theory invalid, but indefensible. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the remaining shortcomings of Mahmood's Hindu Concept of Order. Again, I include this theory to provide context to Gurpurhal Singh's argument that India is an ethnic democracy.

THE HINDU CONCEPT OF ORDER AND ETHNIC DEMOCRACY

According to Mahmood's line of reasoning, the Congress Party is the embodiment of the Hindu Concept of Order in modern Indian politics. The Congress Party is relevant to the study of this concept because of its historical role as a broad, inclusive, and dominating force in India's Freedom Struggle and subsequent national development. Additionally, the Congress Party serves as a constant between this study, the work of Gurpurhal Singh (2000), and that of Cynthia Mahmood (1989).

Like Indian society, however, the Congress Party has changed significantly since its formation in 1885. The most significant change occurred following the death of Jawaharlal Nehru and the eventual ascendancy of his daughter Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India. Congress under Nehru was more-or-less an "internally democratic, federal, and consensual organization" (Lijphart 1996, 264). Then, under Indira Gandhi, Congress became "a centralized and hierarchical party" (Lijphart 1996, 264). During the late 1960's, several states began to demand the devolution of more power from the central government to the state governments, for example the social and political movements in Punjab and

Tamil Nadu. Under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, Congress responded by increasing measures within Parliament to further centralize her and the central government's authority and power.

Indira Gandhi continued her centralization program until her death in 1984. In the years just prior to her assassination, she began consciously appealing to Hindus through the use of Hindu(ized) language and symbols. This is partly explained by the fact that the Congress had begun to weaken and was desperate for a new political platform and new political appeal. Minorities were forming new parties that were taking away traditional Congress vote banks — the low caste peoples, Muslims, and other minorities. Indira Gandhi's autocratic style of leadership also drove many Congress politicians out of the party. Many of these former Congress members joined preexisting parties or formed new ones.

Following her death, Rajiv Gandhi, her son, took charge of the party. Surprisingly, he loosened the tight grip that his mother had placed on India. He may not have had a choice since her attempts to pull challenging minority groups back⁶ towards the center had backfired, inspiring mass agitations and secessionist movements. Rajiv Gandhi attempted to resolve the conflicts that erupted in a more accommodating manner. He encouraged dialogue and attempted to meet key demands of the movements. In particular, Rajiv Gandhi worked to end the insurgencies in Assam and Punjab; he signed accords with both groups in 1985. However, the record of success is mixed. Conflict continued in both places with extremists assaulting the members of their communities who had signed the agreements with the central government. Additionally, not all of the demands that were recognized in the accords were met, thus, over time, invalidating the process.

The nature of these accords and the relationships between the minority ethnic groups and the central government is an appropriate point of departure for examining the nature of democracy and citizenship in India. Gurpurhal Singh builds on Cynthia Mahmood's understanding of the Hindu Concept of Order and demonstrates in his case-study on Punjab that India is an ethnic democracy in which the central government is the embodiment of Hinduism as a "meta-ethnicity" which attempts to control minority groups through assimilation, coercion, and violence (Singh 2000, 45). He has also described

⁶ Many of these ethnic (cultural, linguistic, regional, and religious) cleavages existed prior to independence from Britain, but the common cause of Nationalist and Independence Movements and the organizational prowess of the Congress Party leadership brought many of these groups together, effectively placing persistent conflicts over the identity of Indian governance on the back burner.

the geographical, historical, and political developments that helped to form this political paradigm. An outline of his points will follow. I will also address certain aspects of the importance of geography in these conflicts that Singh did not explore.

According to Singh, India became an ethnic democracy as a result of its political formation. He cites six issues; the first three contrast strongly with American style secular majoritarianism which encourages minorities to assimilate publicly while permitting them to practice their distinctiveness in private, and the last three issues differ from Lijphart's consociationalism in that they do not provide any meaningful representation or protection of minority ethnic groups (Lijphart 1977; 1996).⁷ The issues Singh cites are as follows. First, secularism was subordinated by the "nationalism of the Hindu majority" (Singh 2000, 46). Second, the adoption of the Westminster model's first-past-the-post electoral system buttressed ethnic majoritarianism (Singh 2000, 46). Third, "the 'institutionalization' of one-party dominance under Congress went hand in hand with an essentially unitary structure with the supremacy of the elite all-India administrative service" (Singh 2000, 46). Fourth, political representation of ethnic groups was not proportional, nor was autonomy given to minority groups (Singh 2000, 46). Fifth, the partition of the subcontinent was "against consociationalism and for the construction of a majoritarian and a unitary state" (Singh 2000, 46). Lastly, there is little, if any, veto power in decision making for minority ethnic groups (Singh 2000, 46).

What has emerged in India, then, is a *de facto* ethnic democracy unlike, for instance, Israel's *de jure* ethnic democracy. In order for the Hindu majority to enforce its ethnic hegemony on others, it has resorted to extra-legal means, particularly in regards to the excessive use of force by police and security forces. For example, in the case of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the central and state governments that represent the Hindu meta-ethnicity were actively involved or complicit in violence towards minorities (Tambiah 1996).

India, like Israel, has its own "master narrative" of ethnic conflict and violence, Hindu versus Muslim (as opposed to Israel's Jew versus Arab). However, these are not the only ethnic cleavages. For example, Israel has other minorities that possess varying levels of rights and citizenship — Druze, Christians, and Bedouins (Byman 2002, 56). India similarly has other narratives such as the North-South/Aryan-Dravidian, the high caste/low caste,

⁷ Lijphart theory of consociationalism argues that by providing adequate representation and protection to ethnic groups in ethnically divided countries, stability and peace can be reasonably guaranteed.

and for the purpose of this study, the Hindu versus non-Hindu conflicts. Thus, the Indian story could be read as an environment in which:

non-Hindu minorities have constituted a majority in the federating unit, the operation of hegemonic control has been exercised through the Hindu majority (and other supporters and ethnic groups); the use of residual powers by the union government; the use of administrative structures ('the official regime'); and the coercive power of the Indian state (Singh 2000, 47–48).

Included in the non-Hindu groups are Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and non-Hindu tribal groups. Therefore, these regional non-Hindu minorities at the periphery and India's more central Muslim community are appropriate units with which to analyze the central government's hegemonic control. They further support the argument that India is an ethnic democracy in that they represent:

aggrieved sections of [Indian society] with a long list of grievances against the centre, deeply resentful of the latter's encroachment of their political autonomy and democratic civil rights. In different ways and to varying degrees, they have desisted from taking part in the orthodox nationalist discourse (Singh 2000, 49).⁸

Singh gives several reasons for these grievances (Singh 2000, 49). First, these regions were largely not under the domination of the Hindu majority as represented by the Congress Party. In the case of the north-eastern areas of India, the British had encouraged many local minority groups to exercise their distinctiveness and had "adhered to a system of exercising political influence without direct interference or control" (Singh 1984, 1057). Second, these regions suffered most from the violence associated with Partition and/or they were forced to join India. Third, the populations of these regions are largely non-Hindu and do not consider India, or inclusion within it, as an integral part their ethnic group history and identity. In sum, these regions lie on the outskirts of mainstream India and at a distance from the direct influence of the

⁸ Singh citing T.V. Sathyamurthy, "The State of the Debate on Indian Nationalism," 25th Millennium Anniversary Conference, London School of Economics (October 1996) (unpublished), 15.

Hindu Concept of Order. It seems then that competition for authority is inherently ethnic in composition.

The definition of these non-Hindu communities is an issue that needs to be addressed. Though Muslims form a rather large minority ethnic group, they do not comprise a cohesive community. Within this ethnic community are multiple sects, the most prominent of which are the Sunnis and Shias, but there are also Wahabis, Deobandis, Khojas, Ismailis, Ahmadis, and others. The internal divisions of the larger Muslim ethnic group complicate the designation of a single Muslim ethnicity and the understanding of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Other groups, such as Sikhs in the Punjab and tribals in northeastern India are similarly divided along sectarian and tribal lines, respectively. Additionally, linguistic cleavages also exist.

The political problems that these peripheral regions have faced are not only addressed in terms of ethnicity. These regions have also faced economic crises, often linked to development or the lack thereof. Many Sikhs, particularly successful farmers in the wealthy state of Punjab, “[felt] their interests to be at odds with those of the predominantly Hindu central government” (Mahmood 1989, 330). Residents of poorer, underdeveloped states, like Jammu and Kashmir and Assam argue that they have been neglected by the central government regarding development funds and projects. While Myron Weiner has shown that Assam’s fortune was much better than some of the mainstream Hindu states in the Hindi-belt (1978, 135), the economic realities and people’s perception of them are much more complicated. Some of the factors that have contributed to Assam’s low level of development are Nehru’s distrust of capitalism, the drive for industrial self-sufficiency, and the persistence of colonial patterns of economic exploitation.

Geographical factors are also responsible, especially in the case of Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, and other northeastern states. These areas had traditional routes of trade and commerce that were cut off by Partition. The northeast was also separated from much of India and only connected by a thin strip of land. This region became dependent upon the Indian mainland for the provision of consumer goods and fuel. Efforts were made to reduce the mounting costs of shipping and transporting goods to these regions, but these undermined the comparative advantage of wealthier states. Rob Jenkins has pointed out that since the beginning of the liberal economic reforms in 1991, states have begun to compete with one another directly rather than through the center as a mediator (1999). Consequently, many of the subsidies that reduced transport costs have been or are in the process of being eliminated. It remains to be seen what long-term impact economic and political liberalization will have in regard to addressing the concerns of ethnic minority groups on the periphery, and highlights new avenues of inquiry.

The above reasons explain why ethnic groups, particularly those on the periphery, resist Hindu dominance and assimilation. They do not, however, explain why the central government would devote so much effort, resources, and blood to maintaining a firm grip on these territories and on the groups which resist, nor do they explain why the government was convinced that this method would work. Regarding geography, Singh has duly noted that “these territories are also distinctive in that they form the external borders of the Indian state — borders which have been the site of several wars which have sacralized the territory of the union within the inner core of Indian nationalism” (2000, 49). An examination of Assam’s position within this land follows.

ASSAM’S CRISIS OF CITIZENSHIP: A BY-PRODUCT OF ETHNIC DEMOCRACY

For the sake of argument, I employ Mahmood’s Hindu Concept of Order. This is not an endorsement, per se, but a necessary exercise in linking my study with that of Gurpurhal Singh’s. Flexibility within the Hindu Order allows minority ethnic groups to ally themselves with the central government. It is not, however, necessary for individuals or groups to change their ethnicity or regional character as long as these components are not at odds with the central government’s mission (Mahmood 1989, 333–334). Within such a system, I argue that non-Hindus can become “good” Indians so long as they do not challenge Hindu dominance. What is important is that minorities’ contributions to India must promote and strengthen Indian-ness, or Hindu-ness. Refusal to satisfy the Center’s demands is answered with punishment. This reward and punishment scenario produces fluctuations in *de facto* citizenship benefits in which “good” and “bad” Indians receive republican or liberal citizenship status, respectively.

In order to illustrate this point, I will examine the importance of suffrage and its importance for citizenship as demonstrated by the role of voter lists in Assam during the Assam Movement. It is important to note that the Congress and Janata Parties were in power during this period and represented the Hindu Order. Additionally, the Assamese elite who sought control of their state government in order to protect and preserve their cultural and linguistic identity led this movement. At times, the Bengali Muslims were useful to the Assamese and at other times to the central government.

The Assamese were afraid of becoming marginalized in their own homeland. Demographic changes such as the irregularly large population growth of Bengali Muslims, especially in districts adjacent to Bangladesh, coupled with the fact that Bengali Hindus retained prominent positions in

industry, education, and the state bureaucracy caused many Assamese to believe that the Bengalis would soon consume them (Horowitz 2001, 120). The Assamese sought to change this situation, and the procedural method to affect this change was the electoral process. I argue, however, that the operational, political, and legal tools used to conduct elections were in effect broken.

In 1979, during a routine review of the electoral rolls in a few of Assam's districts, large numbers of names belonging to illegal Bangladeshi immigrants were discovered. Assamese leaders presented the government with what they considered to be an exhaustive list of names that should be removed from the voter lists. Of the 70,000 names that were presumably wrongly included, the Election Commission contended that 45,000 of them were illegal and should be removed (Singh 1984, 1062). The solution to this problem, however, was not as simple as it should have been. An Assamese member of Parliament died, and by-elections were called. The Election Commission would not change the electoral rolls because the process was too slow to have them prepared in time for the election. The Assamese rallied in opposition to the upcoming election and were prepared to prevent them from being held. The collapse of the Janata government in New Delhi, however, ended the need for this election, and it was cancelled.

The Assamese demand for revision of the electoral roll persisted. The fall of the Janata government allowed Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party to return to the national scene. Parliamentary elections were to take place in 1980, and many Assamese made correction of the voter lists a precondition for holding elections. Again, the Election Commission did not revise the electoral rolls and tensions flared.

When the election procedures began the Assamese began their protest. They were able to prevent elections from being held in all of the districts under their control but not in the predominantly Bengali (Hindu and Muslim) districts. Consequently, the rivalry between the Assamese and Bengalis reached a new peak. Congress did, nevertheless, win the national elections, even those in Assam. An era of conflict had begun between the people of Assam and the central government—the Assam Movement.

The leaders of the Assam Movement launched a blockade of exports from the state. Believing that Assam was treated as an internal colony of India, they sought to cut off India's access to the state's natural resources, most notably oil, jute, and timber. In the meantime, the once peaceful movement became a campaign of violent resistance. The central government seemed unprepared or unwilling to resolve the conflict, and the situation began to threaten national stability. The central government dismissed the

state government and placed the state under President's Rule three times between 1981 and 1983.

President's Rule is allowed for one year, after which new elections must be held. As this time was approaching in 1983, and elections for a new state government and for empty Parliamentary seats were called. In the interim years, Indira Gandhi and the Assamese leadership failed to resolve the electoral issue. She, therefore, perhaps hoping that a more agreeable Assamese leadership would emerge from the elections, moved ahead with the voting process. Due to the failure to reach an agreement, the Election Commission announced that it would use the unrevised 1979 electoral rolls.

Many Assamese mobilized to prevent the elections, and large numbers of Assamese members of the bureaucracy refused to facilitate the execution of these elections. The central government brought in election workers from other states and increased the security forces. The government forced the elections on the people of Assam. However, not all of the inhabitants of this divided state were opposed to the elections, and voter turnout was considerably high in the predominantly Bengali and Boro⁹ districts while turnout was low in the Assamese dominated areas (Weiner 1983, 281). "Though Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party won (90 out of 108 declared seats), the boycott successfully prevented the emergence of a popularly elected Congress government that could negotiate with the center on behalf of the Assamese" (Weiner 1983, 281).¹⁰

Ethnic tension in Assam increased, and the Assamese-Bengali divide was further exacerbated. Thousands of Bengali Muslims were killed in the massacre at Nellie. Each clash invited a reprisal that fueled other simmering ethnic cleavages, and incidents of ethnic violence occurred throughout the state.

AN EXPLANATION

Ethnic tension existed in Assam, and this was, perhaps in the short term, unreconcilable. However, the "trigger" that polarized the communities and brought them to war was avoidable. The point of contention was the inclusion of non-citizens on the electoral lists. The government and the Assamese leadership failed to agree on how to determine who was a citizen. The

⁹ The Boros are another ethnic group native to Assam. They too sought to protect and preserve their distinct ethno-cultural identity.

¹⁰ Weiner citing "How credible after the 'Popular Verdict'?" *The Hindu*, International Edition, 12 March 1983, 11.

determination would be made based upon their year of entry into Assam and India. The government of India insisted on 1971 as the cut off year as this would allow Hindu refugees from East Pakistan (from Partition) to be considered citizens. This date would prevent Bangladeshis who had come to India during the Pakistani Civil War from being declared citizens. On the other hand, the leaders of the Assam Movement (All Assam Student's Union, AASU; and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, AAGSP) proposed a system that would scrutinize the legality of citizenship for people who came between 1951 and 1961, most likely granting them citizenship if they could provide proof that they were indeed Indian citizens. It would make immigrants who came between 1961 and 1971 stateless and relocate them to other parts of India. Immigrants who had come after 1971 would be deported to Bangladesh. The Assamese failed to convince the government to accept this procedure in part because their methods for determining who should be removed from the lists, and subsequently Assam, did not distinguish between Bengali Hindus and Muslims. In fact, their propaganda often portrayed enclaves of West Bengali immigrants as foreigners. The central government was not prepared to deport Bengali Hindus to Bangladesh. In any event, the government of Bangladesh refused to acknowledge the presence of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India, and did not accept any deportations of these immigrants.

The issue of determining who is a citizen is critical and should be carefully addressed, but this is not the only issue concerning the voter lists. In 1979, the lists contained large numbers of illegal immigrants, but also included the names of legitimate citizens and eligible voters. This was not the case in 1983. When the Election Commission announced that the 1979 electoral rolls were to be used, this meant that they would not include the names of citizens who had become eligible to vote in the previous four years. The Election Commission argued that it was unable to make these revisions due to the lack of time before the upcoming elections. However, the Central government did have another option by which it could have postponed the elections and provided more time for agreement.

The central government is only allowed to exercise President's Rule for a year at a time when it must then call for new elections to install a new state government. Since this is a constitutional procedure, the central government could have considered a constitutional amendment. After a discussion, the Parliament seemed to favor this course of action but would have limited the application of the amendment to this specific incident. Indira Gandhi did not exercise this option. She instead imposed elections on Assam which in turn produced un-representative state and Parliamentary governments, further

alienated the Assam leadership, and inflamed ethnic tensions to a degree approaching genocidal dimensions.

CITIZENSHIP: A REWARD FOR LOYALTY

The dispute between the Assamese and the central government was over citizenship. The Assamese wanted to fully exercise their rights as citizens if they were to remain within the India Union. Their primary political concern was the selection of their political representatives. Simply put, citizens are eligible to vote and elect their representatives whereas non-citizens are not. The Assamese, already in fear of being out-populated by Bengalis (particularly Muslims), desperately wanted to elect a state government that would protect their dominant position, language, cultural identity, and attempt to limit the power and influence of non-Assamese in the state. The Assamese assertion of minority ethnic strength was a direct challenge to the central government. The Congress Party, therefore, opted to maintain its control by awarding voting privileges to illegal Bangladeshi immigrants (predominantly Muslim) in return for their political support. The masses of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants became a vote bank for the Congress Party.

By giving these immigrants suffrage in exchange for support, the Congress Party “in effect confer[ed] citizenship upon them” (Weiner 1983, 280). By not updating the rolls, the central government denied a key feature of citizenship to many Assamese. The central government granted non-citizens a republican brand of citizenship and permitted them to actively participate in the electoral process, while many Assamese citizens were denied the right to vote and thus forced to accept a liberal brand of citizenship. Of course, the Assamese did participate. They launched an agitation, a boycott, and a blockade. Their political participation at this juncture, however, was more akin to the kind of activities associated with stateless or colonized peoples fighting for their freedom rather than empowered citizens of a democratic country (much like the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories). It is true that they could have participated in the elections and not boycotted them, but to do so would have been to choose not to defend their distinct Assamese identity (and accede to so-called Hindu Concept of Order)—an option that many Assamese nationalists were unwilling to consider.

CONCLUSION

I have analyzed the Assam Movement in light of and as a challenge to the Hindu Concept of Order and examined the by-product of the Hindu Concept of Order: ethnic democracy. Using the Hindu Concept of Order and following

Gurpurhal Singh's line of argumentation to analyze the Assam Movement, one can see that India, exhibited features of an ethnic democracy.

I argue that a peculiar by-product of India's ethnic democracy creates conflicts between those who accept the authority of the central government and those who challenge it. Usually, the challengers to this authority (the Hindu Concept of Order) are non-Hindus and the defenders are Hindus. However, as was the case in Assam, the challengers were predominantly Hindu and the defenders were both Hindu and Muslim. Rather, the challengers opposed the authority of the Congress led central government (cast as the enforcer of the Hindu Concept of Order) and the defenders accepted this control. This suggests that, post-Independence, the Hindu Concept of Order is more political than religious and concerned more with governance and *realpolitik*. Or, control of the central government is on par with religio-cultural dominance and accession to the political culture that has been shaped by Congress is a form of re-admittance to the Hindu fold.

Nevertheless, the central government's enforcement of its sovereign authority (within the framework of the Hindu Concept of Order) encourages political mobilization of ethnic groups and often brings them into conflict. The conflict in Assam was not for the mere control of resources or to determine which language should be used for government administration. The violent ethnic conflict that erupted during the Assam Movement was over the citizen's right to affect political change - suffrage.

There may be no Hindu Concept of Order as a real force that exists as the manifestation of a collection Hindu will to exercise dominance over non-Hindus or to assert its distinct form of Hindu identity on Hindus that adhere to different principles of what they consider Hinduism and Hindu identity in India. As discussed earlier, this theory is not worth defending. However, it becomes a useful reference tool when examining the roots of ethnic conflict in India. The causes of these conflicts are not the result of age-old animosities that formed in ancient times, yet this theory suggests that there might be something inherently faulty in the current political organization of the Indian state. It is not unlikely or improbable that the method of national organization and accompanying expectations for submission to central authority overlooked the will of many Indians who fell outside the mainstream of Indian Nationalist Movement. Looking back again at Lijphart's model of consociationalism, India's form of representation becomes an easy target. Representation is based on population and minority groups are, therefore, likely to have fewer representatives. Often, minority groups, many of which live in states along India's periphery, do have less representation in the Indian Parliament. When these states became reorganized along linguistic lines, the states basically became ethnic homelands within India. The result is that the

demands of the peripheral, minority groups are less likely to be met than those of the majority groups. Thus, some of the major features of political organization in modern, independent India link political representation with ethnic identity. In many cases, political conflict subsequently becomes ethnic conflict. This was the case in Punjab and Assam.

When the central government of India chooses to deny an ethnic group its constitutionally guaranteed right to political representation for expediency in maintaining its political dominance, the case that India is an ethnic democracy can be made. In such an event it is also likely that this ethnic democracy has transformed from its previous *de facto* status into that of a *de jure* one. I have pointed to the contest over suffrage during the Assam Movement as evidence of this phenomenon. Further, I have tried to provide evidence that demonstrates how dominance of the Congress Party and its characteristic form of leadership and organization threatens the political demands and rights of challengers. In the Punjab, the Khalistanis were not convinced that their identity could be protected within the Indian Union so they chose to resist and secede from it. Likewise, the participants in the Assam Movement sought to protect their identity within the Indian Union by attempting to limit the influence of non-Assamese citizens and non-citizens within the state of Assam.

Unfortunately for the Assamese, the Congress Party and central government's political support rested largely in the non-Assamese population of Assam. These circumstances pitted the Assamese against the central government and increased tensions with non-Assamese ethnic groups. In the short term, the central government chose to deny the exercise of the right to vote to many Assamese and granted it to many non-Assamese who were also not citizens of India—illegal immigrants and their descendents from Bangladesh.

Obviously, this scenario, this conflict, does not conform precisely to Peled's definition of an ethnic democracy as "a political system combining democratic institutions with the dominance of one ethnic group" (1992, 432). The events of the Assam Movement suggest a more fluid interpretation of this concept. This fluidity suggests that there is a spectrum in which ethnic democracies exist on a graded scale between the two ideal types: *de facto* and *de jure*. They are similar in that in both definitions a central government chooses to limit political representation and rights of a particular segment of society in favor of another for the exercise of control. For this reason, and until the rights of minorities are wholly protected against the kind of violations that occurred during the Assam Movement, I contend that India is indeed a form of ethnic democracy.

That said, the conclusion of this paper raises many questions about the character of political mobilization, institutions and conflict in India. What steps can be taken to better understand and remedy the root causes of ethnic conflict in India and to root out the elements of ethnic democracy that plague this diverse and democratic country?

That said, the conclusion of this paper raises many questions about the character of political mobilization, institutions and conflict in India. What steps can be taken to better understand and remedy the root causes of ethnic conflict in India and to root out the elements of ethnic democracy that plague this diverse and democratic country?

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Meena Khandelwal. *Women in Ochre Robes: Gendering Hindu Renunciation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

Until quite recently, useful, theoretically sophisticated book-length studies on contemporary Hindu women's asceticism have been rare, if not altogether nonexistent. Two recent ethnographic studies published in the SUNY series in Hindu Studies make welcome and timely contributions to this emerging—and still comparatively understudied—field.

Meena Khandelwal's *Women in Ochre Robes* is an ethnographic study of *sannyāsinīs*, Hindu female renunciants, based on eighteen months of field research in Haridwar in 1989–91. In response to the absence of “the activities, conflicts, and interpersonal relationships that fill renunciators' everyday lives” (11) from earlier scholarly accounts, Khandelwal deliberately foregrounds the personal and the particular: she focuses on two individual *sannyāsinīs* with whom she lived during her research. Writing in a reflexive and narrative style and often including herself in the text, she strives to make transparent the complex and two-way nature of the power processes that are at work in the course of any ethnographic research project. Thus, the book situates itself carefully *vis-à-vis* recent feminist and postmodern debates concerning ethnographic representation.

Khandelwal's central argument is that the analytical oppositions which have come to characterize the study of Hindu renunciation—renouncer/householder, otherworldly/worldly, ascetic male/domestic female—call for critical rethinking. As this study attests, the sharp distinction between worldly and otherworldly is more blurred in reality: both male and female ascetics acknowledge the significance of social distinctions and often become deeply involved in the concerns of householders. Both of Khandelwal's primary informants, for instance, place great value on social service and physical labor. Thus she argues for a modern reinterpretation of *sannyāsa* as social service and *work* as an integral part of (ascetic) spiritual practice. That this runs counter to the idealized image of the disengaged renouncer is precisely the point. Highlighting individual lives, Khandelwal suggests, problematizes the Dumontian model of dialectical opposition between otherworldly renunciation and social engagement. Rather, the dialogue (or tension) between the two is *internal* to contemporary Hindu renunciation.

Chapter One, “Gendering Hindu Renunciation,” surveys the institution of Brahmanical renunciation and the ambivalent textual and historical spaces that it has traditionally accorded to women, particularly ascetic women. Chapters Two and Three introduce Khandelwal's primary informants, one of

whom lives a relatively quiet life in a small Haridwar ashram, while the other is the spiritual leader and administrator of a busy ashram, with many devotees and charitable projects. In these chapters Khandelwal seeks to demonstrate the coexistence of worldly and otherworldly values in the lives of these renunciant women. In Chapter Four, she shows how the dynamic metaphor of journeys allows can legitimate different, even contradictory styles of religious thought and practice.

Chapter Five addresses the question of saintly legitimacy, arguing that there is no consistent, objective set of criteria for evaluating the “authenticity” or “saintliness” of Hindu renouncers. Khandelwal examines how Hindu householders balance discrimination and faith in their attitudes towards ascetics and gurus. She also discusses the issue of status and power and the “ways in which politico-economic power transforms into saintly prestige and vice versa” (165).

In the sixth and last chapter, “Sannyāsinīs as Women,” Khandelwal turns to the question of gender and its relevance for Hindu renunciation. In spite of the refrain that in renunciation there is no male or female, she argues, “renunciant discourse and practice are not only highly gendered, but they are sometimes gendered feminine” (192). One example of this is the interpretation of *sannyāsa* as “spiritual motherhood.” On the other hand, the relevance of gender is also manifested in the pressure for women renouncers to be more circumspect in their behavior than male *sādhus*. Ultimately, even though they transgress social norms and ideals, *sannyāsinīs* present themselves as exceptions rather than as models for householder women. Yet, in its very ambiguity, as a site of “undetermination,” *sannyāsa* is a potential space for female individual agency.

Women in Ochre Robes is a persuasive and original contribution to the study of renunciant women in South Asia. With its richly detailed and intimate portraits of ascetic women and its thoughtful analysis of the complex interweaving of gender, power, and social concerns in contemporary Hindu renunciation, it warrants attention across disciplines. If the book has one limitation, ironically it is also one of its strengths—namely, its focus on “the particular and the human,” on the lives of two Haridwar *sannyāsinīs*. When the book proceeds to make some larger claims about gender, renunciation, and female agency in Hinduism based on that rather specific context, the reader is left to wonder about their wider applicability. Overall, however, Khandelwal is successful in negotiating scope, generality, and complexity. While neither romanticizing *sannyāsinīs* as feminist heroes nor denying the pervasiveness of patriarchy, she wants to demonstrate that “Hindu women do sometimes determine their own lives in fairly radical ways” (4). Resisting models of interpretation that depict women simply as submissive victims of patriarchy,

she calls attention instead to the complexity and “indeterminacy” of Hindu *sannyāsa*, its contradictions and ambiguities.

Lynn Teskey Denton. *Female Ascetics in Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). With a foreword by Steven Collins and a supplemental bibliography by Meena Khandelwal.

In a footnote to her 1991 article, “Varieties of Hindu Female Asceticism,”¹ Lynn Teskey Denton wrote: “A fuller description of female ascetic practice, belief and daily life is contained in my doctoral thesis (in preparation).” Regrettably, she did not live to see the completion of her work. When she passed away in 1995, she left behind a nearly completed dissertation, but as an unpublished work it remained inaccessible to others who might have benefited from reading it. However, in a unique collaborative effort, scholars who knew Denton’s work came together to salvage as much of it as possible and get it published. Materials retrieved from computer discs, manuscripts, and typescripts were edited and arranged into book format by Steven Collins. The eventual publication *Female Ascetics in Hinduism* is a tribute to Denton’s life’s work, the long-awaited “fuller description” that complements her earlier work.

The study is based on over two years of extensive fieldwork in Varanasi between 1976 and 1981 and interviews with 134 ascetic women and girls. The early chapters serve to situate them within two larger contexts: normative understandings of Hindu women’s religiosity on the one hand, and the larger fold of Hindu asceticism on the other. Chapter One describes the norm to which female asceticism is the exception: orthodox Brahmanical textual notions about women’s inherent nature and appropriate duties, and contemporary Hindu women’s religious practice. In Chapter Two, Denton turns to the sociological groups who fall outside of this norm: widows, unmarriageable girls and women, and female ascetics.

Chapters Three and Four focus on the ideological and social universe of Hindu asceticism and on mapping its diverse sectarian communities. However, Denton argues that sectarian affiliation is not the primary factor of Hindu ascetic diversity, nor is it necessarily the most useful indicator of an ascetic’s identity or status; for example, members of two different sects may well practice the same ascetic discipline. Instead, Denton suggests a framework of three distinct but related factors: sectarian affiliation, spiritual path, and ascetic mode. By “spiritual path,” she means a given set of “customary practices pursued for the purpose of attaining a religious goal”

¹ In Julia Leslie (ed.), *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women* (London: Pinter, 1991): 211-31.

(91), exemplified by the classical model of the three ways of action, knowledge, and devotion. As for the “ascetic modes,” “each is a different, institutionalized way of being ascetic; each is marked by a unique ritual of initiation and comprises a different concatenation of beliefs and practices, which dictate a distinctive lifestyle” (93). The three ascetic modes applicable to her own research are renunciatory asceticism (*sannyāsa*), celibate asceticism (*brahmacharya*), and tantric asceticism.

Chapter Five, “Socioreligious Aspects of Female Asceticism in Varanasi,” contains the most in-depth analysis of Denton’s fieldwork data, including statistical information and a brief characterization of her informants’ socioeconomic backgrounds. It also describes in some detail the three establishments in Varanasi that house young *brahmachārini* ascetics. The last chapter, “Sainthood, Society, and Transcendence,” was written as a freestanding article in 1984. It stands out from the rest of the book because of its textual focus: here Denton surveys a geographically and historically diverse selection of legendary and hagiographical accounts of Indian women saints.

What Denton stresses throughout her study is the astounding diversity and heterogeneity that characterizes Hindu asceticism in general, and Hindu female asceticism in particular. The analytical framework of sectarian affiliation, spiritual path, and “ascetic mode” is a useful one for making sense of this diversity. One of Denton’s contributions that deserves special mention is her careful clarification of terminology. In the absence of a single common expression for a ‘Hindu female ascetic,’ she explains the range of terms that denote different kinds of female renunciants and their differences in nuance and semantic scope. In fact, the book as a whole, and Chapter Three in particular, provides a useful introduction to the basic terminology and characteristic styles of Hindu asceticism. While the book is, in terms of its style and presentation, closer to traditional anthropological analysis than more recent, self-reflexive ethnographic prose, Denton’s material and her conclusions are far from being outdated. Based on my own research visits to some of the same ashrams in 2002–03, Denton’s characterization of female ascetics in Varanasi is largely applicable and relevant to present circumstances.

It would have been fascinating to see how Denton herself would have shaped her material and argument, had she been granted the time to complete her work, and how she would have brought it into conversation with more recent scholarship. As it stands, however, *Female Ascetics in Hinduism* is still a landmark work, arguably the first ethnographic study of Hindu female ascetics of such a wide and ambitious scope.

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